

THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular★

Magazine

MAY 20, 1927

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IN
THE TALL
TIMBER

BY
HOLMAN DAY



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bar of **Baby Ruth**

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approval. The ver
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peanuts, caps the max

There are also other
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the "Hound of the Barrys,"
be Irish to follow with rapt
lives only in history.

Volume LXXXIV

T W I C E

Number 3

The Popular Magazine

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THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIV

MAY 20, 1927

No. 3



In the Tall Timber

By Holman Day

Author of "So Sailed We," "Squared," Etc.

Up in Damaris, a woodsmen's camp in the Northern wilderness, the disputes of the men were settled by an old hermit. But when the case of the Armstrongs came along, neither the code of this primitive arbiter nor the constituted machinery of the law could untangle the difficult situation.

CHAPTER I.

A KNIGHT OR A RASCAL.

REVENGE is a sort of wild justice, which the more a man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out." Francis Bacon wrote this terse apothegm out of his wisdom. Printed and framed, it hung on the wall of Judge Whitman's chamber in the county courthouse, among other sage maxims which the judge valued.

In the case of State vs. Bart Corlick, two juries evidently took the strictly human view that revenge was justified; at

any rate, one jury had been hopelessly "hung"—only three men holding out for conviction—and the panel was discharged; at the second trial the jury acquitted Bart Corlick.

The crime was sordid and requires merely casual mention; it was a killing of one renegade by another in a fight over a matter of "double cross." Only that phase was brought out in the evidence.

Justice Zenas Whitman's white hair fairly bristled, while he ran a condemnatory gaze along the faces of the jurymen, after the foreman had reported. Then the judge arose and told the jury what

he thought about the panel and the verdict.

He was the oldest judge on the bench of the State, in point of service; he had been a martinet school-teacher before he entered law; he often voiced opinions from the bench with a vigor and a pedagogic freedom which the younger justices did not dare to copy. Sometimes irascibility led him rather far.

But in this instance he was plainly restraining himself with great effort, lest his emotions might take him absolutely too far—into a storm of undignified scolding. Nevertheless, he fairly flayed these twelve men, though he did it, as District Attorney Jason Brickett said, after the judge had flung himself through the door of his chamber, "with the statuesque exactitude of judicial terminology."

Brickett, being on intimately friendly terms with the judge, quickly followed his honor into the chamber. Judge Whitman was fairly ripping off his robe.

"Beg pardon, judge!" Mr. Brickett grinned and chuckled, unable to keep down his hilarity, though he had failed to cage his quarry. "You forgot to do the usual thing and wish the jurymen a safe journey home."

"I didn't forget it. And I know where they belong! But I couldn't dishonor the judicial bench by telling them to go there."

Brickett picked up the robe, laughing. The judge had rolled it into a ball and had heaved it into a corner. "We have to take our chances with juries, judge!" stated the attorney, returning from the closet where he had hung the robe.

"The system is growing worse all the time, in these days of selfish hurry, Brickett! Not in all cases, of course, but in too many. Good men are too busy to serve, and they are thinking mostly about their own business when they do serve. The fools can't think; they doze through a case, blink like bats, when I'm charging the jury, go out and bring back a verdict according to their prejudices. Corlick ought to go to the chair! He'll be killing somebody of some account, next. Did you see that devilish, bland, patronizing grin the young cur gave me when he walked out of the courtroom?"

"Yes, and I don't blame your present emotions, judge."

"That grin was the sting of the snapper on the raw spot, rasped by that jury," confided the venerable justice. "So I picked all the biggest words in my vocabulary, occupying my thoughts that way when I talked to them. Otherwise, I would have found myself jumping up and down and throwing law-report books at that bunch. I tell you, they've turned loose a cub miscreant who will not wait for the excuse of revenge, the next time he kills."

A voice startled the judge and the attorney.

"He says he's going to be very careful from now on, judge!"

THE two in the chamber whirled on the speaker. It was the sheriff of the county who had entered.

"I've just had a talk with young Corlick in my office, Judge Whitman. It being perfectly allowable for me to do plenty of cussing, I've said to him what you couldn't very well say!"

"Thank you, sheriff—thank you most heartily!" said the jurist, with cordial unction.

"And he asked me to come and tell you how careful he means to be. He's going into the North Woods to get away from all his bad associates in the city. Says as how woods life will probably straighten him out, though this scare he's had is cure enough, he thinks. But, at any rate, he's going up and ask for a job on that new cut-off the transcontinental line is building through the woods. He ought to be out o' mischief up there!"

Brickett and the justice exchanged glances.

Despite his threescore years and ten, Judge Whitman was as active and hearty as he had been in his younger days. Already he and the district attorney had planned a hunting trip for that autumn in the North Woods. Brickett was in charge of the details.

"Does our line of march take us anywhere near the railroad job, Brother Brickett?"

"We can easily swing that way, your honor, on the jaunt back. And they tell

me the new bridge they're putting over the Damaris Gorge is to be the longest and highest in the State. It may be worth while to take a look at it while we're up in that region."

"All right! Good idea. And we'll also take a look at your protégé, if he's there, sheriff," added the judge dryly. "We'll inspect carefully in order to discover how much good your cussing and counsel have rubbed into him."

The sheriff started to leave the chamber; he was not relishing the judge's ironical banter; it had flicked across feelings which had become a bit sensitive on the matter of Corlick since the heart-to-heart talk with the young fellow. There was a pathetic inside connected with the case. The sheriff had pledged himself to keep discreetly silent on the details. The story got under his skin.

Immediately the prosecutor, who was stung by his failure to convict in a widely advertised case, snapped his own whip of resentment. "Don't let the crooks slick you over with hair-oil talk, Sheriff Anson! We're in a perfectly devilish clinch with crime in this country, right now. Too many easy-going juries—too few convictions—too much delay by tricky defense lawyers. The law must tie on its big brogans and go stamping savagely—scrunch the life out of the whole swarm of crime spiders. I was talking with a barrister from England, the other day, and he made me ashamed of our system over here!"

Sheriff Anson returned a few steps. "Speaking generally, gentlemen, I guess we *are* a little slack. But I was mentioning only this one case."

"I'll tell you what you best do in the one case!" snapped the unmollified prosecutor. "Damaris is located in Sheriff Mel Dobson's county. Write to Dobson and post him on Corlick. The fellow ought to be watched. As Judge Whitman has said, he'll be killing somebody of some account, next!"

"I don't care to be put on record as a prophet, Brickett," the justice reproved. His quick, earlier ire had moderated. "We're making too much talk about an insignificant rogue."

But the attorney persisted with dis-

gust: "Even the sentimental Susies of our parole board would never have dared to parole Corlick if I had nailed him merely with a second-degree conviction. But that verdict has now turned him loose, without any parole regulations about reporting for inspection. Have Mel Dobson watch him, I tell you!"

The sheriff gave no promise; he seemed to be rather hostile to the suggestion.

Judge Whitman lighted a cigar and refrained from further comment of his own.

"Corlick got to you, did he?" prodded Brickett maliciously. "Huh! Think of what he could have done to that parole board!"

Anson was explosive in his retort.

Look here, sir. Things don't come out in a trial like they do in a heart-to-heart talk with a man. The youngster has had a rough road all through a short life till now. I'm pretty sure Corlick isn't his real name. He wouldn't come across to me on that point, not out and out; but he did let a few things drop. There was a black enough blot on his family, he said, without his case smutching the name up worse. He was dumped out as a kid to crawl his own way as best he could. And when a little shaver is left flat at the start, he can't always climb up to the level of good company."

"The same old whine," commented the prosecutor. "No excuse for his killing a man, after getting old enough to know better."

The sheriff stubbornly persisted in his defense of Corlick. "If he had come square out at his first trial and told the court the real truth about why he killed that man, I'm betting Corlick would have been acquitted. Now that it's all over, and the facts can't be dragged out of him under oath, he has come across to me. That's the reason for my sticking up like this, Mr. Brickett."

THERE was a silence. The judge peered through smoke clouds, showing interest.

Then the prosecutor jabbed insolently. "Hope it isn't going to remain a sacred secret between pals."

Sheriff Anson was unruffled; he even smiled. "I can't blame you for being touchy, Mr. Brickett. You have seen only one side of Corlick. Furthermore, he got away from you. Harking back to my younger days, when it would have been easier to go wild in such kind of troubles, I'm going to say that I myself might have killed a man under the same circumstances that carried Corlick away."

"Doubted! But, suppose you let us in on the circumstances," prompted the lawyer.

Sheriff Anson wagged his head slowly in refusal.

Brickett spoke out for himself in the pride of his prosecutor's perspicacity. "I won't ask you to break the seal of your new confessional, Mr. Sheriff. As a matter of fact, I don't need any basic information from you. I *know*! By deduction, of course. You can't tell me anything about the dominant motive in the folly of youth. I guess there was something behind the weak and fishy defense. Rum, insanity and a double cross in a money affair! Huh! I knew better! Anson, there was a girl in the thing. It was a crime of passion—that's what it was!"

"I'm not going to lie, at this stage, and say you're wrong, Mr. Brickett," admitted the sheriff.

"And Corlick went to work and snuffed a rival, eh?" was the blunt question, made in the attorney's vicious, cross-examiner's manner. "Only cheap jealousy, eh?"

Anson hesitated, then he said: "I'm trying to square Corlick a little, so he won't be chased and persecuted, Mr. Brickett." The officer stole a side glance at the justice. "I don't want to write to Mel Dobson. He's a regular rat-tail file when he goes to work on anybody. I'll come out with a little of it about Corlick. He was in love with a good girl, in a clean, honorable way. And *she* loved *him*. And he killed a dirty rat who — Well, I guess I'll have to let it go at that. You're pretty sharp, and you can figure for yourself what happened. I'll say again, I reckon I might have done the same."

"Oh! A case of chivalry!" taunted Brickett.

"Look here, gentlemen!" warned Judge Whitman. "I think the controversy has gone far enough. Brickett, the red in Sheriff Anson's cheeks looks like a bit of danger signal." Then he said, in an effort to make peace: "I may have been a little harsh in my estimate of the young man, Mr. Sheriff. You may have overheard what I said about the grin he gave me, for you were pretty close to the door when I was talking to Brother Brickett."

The sheriff stammered an apology. "But your door was open, your honor, when I came along. I couldn't help hearing what you said. Corlick asked me to say something to you about that. He didn't mean it the way you seemed to take it. Your face, he says, told him how you felt. But he couldn't walk up to you—didn't dare to come to you and explain how *he* felt. He had to do the best he could with a smile, he says, trying to show you he had no hard feelings about your charge to the jury. That was all there was to it, sir."

"A thanksgiving smile, eh?" grunted the justice. "It didn't strike me as appropriate, Mr. Sheriff. It was unfortunate."

"That has been the trouble with him, he says—always getting in wrong."

"That statement carries weight with me. According to the evidence that was allowed, he has a mighty mean record."

"He admits it, your honor. And, even in spite of this close call he's had, I'm afraid his moral nature still needs a lot of patching." The sheriff's lips twisted with a grimace of bitter humor. "He pulled the ripped edges together as best he could, when he talked to me, but he's starting out pretty ragged in some ways; I can see that."

"Now you're talking, Mr. Sheriff," the prosecutor declared.

"But it's only fair to give him a chance to do some mending, sir. He says he means to go to work. However, we all know how much his kind hates hard work. It will be natural, I suppose, to slip into ways of making easy money, just as he has in the past. So, I wish you gentlemen would do what you said

you'd do—look him over at Damaris, if you get the chance.”

Justice Whitman nodded.

Then he glanced up at the framed apothegm from Bacon's wisdom on the wall of the chamber. The judge pedagogically voiced a bit of philosophy of his own. “In this life a man must keep a sharp eye on circumstances, as he ventures among them. Some are stiff props, straight and efficient. Others are clutching coils, crooked and slimy. If a man gets into those coils, only the grace of God, giving strength, can help him.

“We mustn't expect too much from this young fellow who has gone into the North Woods. On the other hand, Mr. Sheriff, Brickett and I will hope, along with you, that the worst won't happen. And we'll let you know, Anson, how he is tackling things!”

The sheriff looked just a bit foolish, catching a quizzical glance from Brickett. Even behind Judge Whitman's solemnity there might be some sly joke, Anson seemed to think. The matter of young Corlick, a nobody, now dropped back into the ruck of humanity, did seem to be too small an affair to engage further the attention of a justice of the supreme judicial court.

At the door, backing out, Anson offered an apology. “I guess I've been taking up too much of your time, your honor, with my gabble about a no-account. But just the same, although I got Corlick sized up as lying more or less about the reforming stuff, he did impress me as a truthful man when he gave me the inside on why he killed that low-down. That is to say, mixed with the tough in him, there is some of the tender, all-right stuff. For the sake of that sacrifice, which I've mentioned, he was willing to gamble on going to the chair. And he says he'd do it all over again for somebody else, if a case ever rose up and banged him good and plenty.”

“*There's a fine rascal to be turned loose in the world!*” snorted Brickett.

Sheriff Anson, only his head visible, as he was closing the door, retorted: “Well, in my reading about the old times, such fellows got themselves nominated as heroes instead of rascals!”

After the door of the latch clicked, the judge remarked: “Evidently our friend has been studying some phases of ancient knighthood.”

“Calling those old tough nuts knights don't gloss over their general hellishness, not for me!” declared Brickett, with a prosecutor's animosity against any sort of lawbreakers.

“At any rate,” pursued the judge, “the insignificant Corlick, having practiced chivalry in this unsentimental era, will possess a new element of interest for us, Brickett, if we happen to meet up with him in the North Country.”

CHAPTER II.

THE BETTER WAY.

AFTER making a tactical detour, Bart Corlick saw that it would bring him in on the Damaris railroad camps, from out of the woods of the North, instead of from the betraying South, haunts of city men. He had been doing his best to make himself as unlike his former self as possible.

Dwelling alone for a time in the woods, he had repeatedly splashed water on his face and had exposed himself to the glare of the Indian-summer sun. The beads of water—little burning glasses—had attacked the pallor which gave embarrassing evidence of months of confinement between his two trials. The vicious burning and blistering had been succeeded by the dull red of what was apparently long exposure, as a man of the outdoors.

Also, he had outfitted at a woodsman's cast-off shop in a town on the border of the wild lands. His cap, belted mackinaw in faded, piebald colors, his corduroy trousers, and his moccasins had been worn into nondescript shabbiness before he bought them. His canvas duffel bag had the stains and markings of long usage.

He was now calling himself “Dan Barter.” For that matter, as Sheriff Anson had surmised, Corlick was not his true name; he had assumed other names in the past, changing as easily as men shift their shirts.

Taking all these pains to disguise his identity, he was again and almost uncon-

sciously yielding to the bent which had influenced him in the past; he was greasing his methods with guile.

But he knew he could not get along very well at Damaris, or in any other assemblage of men, if he appeared with the bleached countenance of a jailbird. At last, his reflection in his pocket mirror gave him full confidence in his appearance.

Having taken this first and, so it seemed to him, necessary step in deceit, he was finding it easy to slip out of certain good resolutions engendered by past stress of emotion. He decided to allow matters to slip along, as occasion seemed to offer the easiest way.

He had made himself outwardly into a woodsman. Therefore, it was not his rôle to be a job hunter at Damaris. He was far from feeling any honest desire to pitch into hard work in a railroad crew.

He did not trouble his mind with speculations about what opportunities he might find at the railroad camps for a fellow who did not mean to wrench his jail-softened muscles in hard toil. At last he was sorry because he had told Sheriff Anson of an intention to go to Damaris. Inquisitive officers had a way of keeping tabs on doubtful characters.

Corlick's assurances of repentance were sincere enough at the moment of utterance, but in this new freedom, and faced by the necessity to get some money into his empty pockets, he was realizing that his contriteness had been of the tongue, not of the heart. Furthermore, and to the exclusion of better sentiments, he was conscious of a general grudge—a growling, ugly animosity against men.

In the talk with the sheriff, Damaris had been on Corlick's tongue as a likely location to fit his professed hankering for honest toil, away from the temptations of the city. The name of the place had penetrated into the dungeon.

A trusty had been friendly and had loaned a newspaper to the prisoner; he had read an article written about the big job undertaken at Damaris by the transcontinental railroad.

At any rate, where so many men were working for good wages, so Corlick re-

flected, there would be plenty of loose money. The region was remote. Money would be in fists and pockets instead of in bank vaults. Not much opportunity for spending that money in shops. There surely would be games. Corlick had a comforting sense of capacity for any sort of game.

His general animosity, spurred again, was almost in a way to make him ruthless. He continued to ponder on his last affair, when the law had clutched him and had thrust him toward the electric chair. He had wrought justifiably, he felt at the time and ever since, to avenge a hideous wrong done to an innocent girl whom he loved. He had killed a brute who had forfeited his right to life in a civilized community.

In avenging one crime in the list of the fiend's enormities, Corlick had determined to protect the girl's pride. The idea of her enduring a battery of questions in court, of exposing her agony of shame before a gaping crowd, had been loathsome to Corlick. To protect her peace of mind he had gambled on his life.

He admitted to himself that his stand had more or less of sentimental folly in it, but he had secretly taken pride in the folly, holding to the vague idea that it counted for good against a lot of the mean things in his nature. Waiting all the long weeks in prison, he had been comforted much by reflections along that line.

HIS altruism was not supporting him very well after his acquittal. He was back in the same old world, and that rancor against men who misunderstood was persisting in him.

For the sake of excusing his ill-formed notions about getting an easy living, Corlick was not admitting that his stubborn silence in regard to the girl had given to the law unwarrantable odds. He was used to gambling—to betting against odds. He had merely taken another of his gambler's chances, as he had a right to do.

Winning, he had smiled blandly at the judge, forgiving one who had denounced him, with a hint of savage intensity in

his charge to the jury. The judge had played the game.

But Corlick insisted on hanging to his grudge against the mere bystanders—mankind in general. He was quite willing to allow the feeling to befog all the other issues. Now that he was free once more, he did not try to search through the foggy grudge to find a sure and honest foundation for right living. He was merely hoping that he would not be tempted too much; he wanted to find easy money without taking too many risks. He would not be able to play fast and loose, with a record as a murderer, twice tried for the crime.

There ought to be opportunities, surely, in a place like Damaris. Therefore, Corlick had decided to give the camps the once-over, despite his foolish tip to the sheriff.

He examined with satisfaction the sharp edge of a manicured nail on his little finger. He knew a slick way of using that finger nail on cards passing through his hands. If he were obliged to go to work honestly, he would be able to put up with the hateful business for a time, he ruefully decided. But he was now ready to enter the camps in the guise of a voyageur from the North; he could say he was taking a swing around for his own amusement, after a season's hard work as a fishermen's guide, or something of the sort.

Trudging along, he practiced a nasal drawl; he had met up with a real woodsman who talked that way. He allowed his jaw to sag and propped open his eyes and cultivated a stupid expression. It was his notion of how simple honesty should look.

He resolved to allow the details of action to take care of themselves, after he reached Damaris. There was no telling in advance what the place was like, or what opportunities he would find. A hint of an opportunity was offered before he came in sight of the camps.

Off at one side of the woodland trail a man was kneeling, digging into the duff. In his moccasins Corlick made no sound as he walked. The man took out a small packet from his shirt pocket and laid it in the hole and began to pack

the dirt over it. He cast a precautionary look around him and spied the stranger.

In a panic, using both hands, the man pawed out the duff with the energy of a dog securing a buried bone. He stuffed the packet back inside his shirt collar, scrambled up, and hustled out of sight among the trees.

Before he reached the clearing where the Damaris camps were located, Corlick saw two or three other men, each by himself, sneaking off into the undergrowth, warily casting about with their eyes to discover whether they were observed. He could not guess what these movements signified. But he was able to make a pretty shrewd estimate after he arrived in the clearing and had observed what was going on there.

On a spur track of the new line, now in course of construction, was a car guarded at each end by a man with a sawed-off shotgun. The car windows had iron grilles. Workmen were entering at one end of the car and issuing from the other end, counting money as they came out. It was the pay car on its fortnightly visit to Damaris.

Those men whom he had seen in the woods, Corlick now guessed, had copied some of the manners of the woods. They were imitating squirrels and were burying what was of value—money instead of nuts. Evidently the more wary individuals up there, far from law and banks, figured that their money was safer in the ground than on their persons.

THE paymaster was paying with bills instead of hard money, Corlick saw. Also, according to his survey of the apprehensive money hidiers, thieves must have been operating in the camps. Then there would be opportunities at Damaris—chances for a trained and slick performer. He let his jaw sag and assumed his practiced air of silly stupidity.

Finding a convenient seat on a stump, he rested himself and watched the men count their money. He had always relished seeing money in men's hands; it had stimulated his wits; it set him to figuring on how he could get hold of it. Other men stole off, here and there, filtering out of the clearing. But, so his

comforting observation went, most of the crew stuffed their money into their pockets and hung about the camps.

A man sauntered past the stump and casually inspected the person who crowned it. Returning the inspection, Corlick discovered that this was the trusty who had shown him certain favors in jail, including the loan of newspapers. The man had finished his term for a minor offense and had gone out of the jail before Corlick's trial.

There were no eavesdroppers; men were too much occupied with their money affairs to pay any attention to a come-by-chance voyageur passing the time of day with one of the crew.

"Saw by the papers they had acquitted you, Corlick. Was it what *you* saw in the paper I lent you—was it the piece about Damaris that fetched you up here—same as it brought *me*?"

"Might have been," assented the other listlessly. But, with earnestness, he urged: "Don't call me Corlick. I'm Dan Barter now."

"Good shift! The other name wouldn't get you much. Let me introduce myself under my new monicker. I'm Jack Armstrong. Hope it gets me something in the strong-arm game!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" blurted Corlick.

"Specially, or just in a general way?" asked the former trusty.

"Specially! That name—you'll have to drop it!"

"What for?" The man curled his lip insolently.

"I tell you to do it!"

"Not enough reason!"

"It's the real name of the best friend I've got in the world. I won't have it smirched."

The other man laughed. "Well, that's a queer pick-up I've made. Just by chance, too, because it sounded like it was in my line. It was a hunch. But I won't drop it! Now, keep your seat, Mister Barter. If you get up and try to use that fist you're doubling, I'll pass the word that you're Bart Corlick. How about it?"

"It's a mean trick you're playing, you know."

"Your pal ever sentenced under his right name?"

"No! No! And he's on the square, and he wanted to keep his name clean, I tell you!"

"Much obliged for his doing so to date! Now, look here, Dan, between only you and me. We're two birds of a feather, and we won't mention *jail* anywhere near *bird*. But we've got a common bond. Let's shake on it and play in together up here. I'd rather take a crook's chance on a chap like you than on cussed hypocrites who juggle their stuff so as to do everybody, including best friends!"

Corlick hesitated.

"Mebbe I can put you in the way of something!" urged the man who had been a jail mate.

"I don't want to turn down any real friend. Heaven knows I need one bad enough! I've been awful lonesome up in those woods," lamented Corlick.

"I was a pal to you in jail. I'll be one outside."

Corlick put out his hand, and the other man gripped it.

"You've got a good head on you," commanded the newly pledged friend. "Going up North and roughing it, so I see, to get off the skimmed-milk color. You look like a real trapper chap!"

"I've been wondering what I'd claim to be. That may be it."

"Looking for work on the job here?"

"No, not if I can dodge it."

"*You* can—with a good excuse, too. Tell everybody concerned you've got plenty of dough from your last season's catch."

CORLICK'S eyes lighted with a sudden gleam. He had hazy plans, but somehow this suggestion seemed to be a solid something on which he might be able to stand and operate. One must have a good excuse for the possession of money.

"I've had to work, blast it!" confessed the other. "I whanged in here before I had thought up something good, like you've done. Look here, Dan," he whispered; "if I'm caught short—no matter how—will you grab in and help me? The

word of thieves!" he added grimly. "I'll bank on it if you'll pass it to me."

"I don't relish the slur——" began Corlick, but a sense of cunning and his hope for opportunities reproved his flash of resentment.

It had been good strategy to profess repentance in order to jolly a high sheriff, but there was no sense in being a fool now, when one's pockets were empty. "Oh, all right, Jack! I'll stand by you. Guess I'm one o' your kind, all right. But I've got to fight shy of crooked work. They'll nail me the next time I'm up."

"Glad you feel that way, Dan." Armstrong's eyes narrowed. "It'll help in keeping you straight with *me*—for the time being, anyway. But if you ain't straight in *my* business, if it comes to that, I shan't go to no law about you. I've also killed my own man who done me dirt!"

He walked off, having observed that men in groups were looking that way. A man in one of the groups accosted Armstrong when the latter sauntered past.

"Who's your friend?"

"No friend of mine, mister! Never saw him before."

"Pretty long talk you had with him." The man was showing a sullen hostility in the case of Armstrong.

The latter hid his sudden qualms behind a grin. He had been noting for some days the air of men toward him. There had been sour looks, suspicious stares.

"I've been pumping him about how much money there is in trapping. He says he has dug plenty of jack outa the job. Maybe I'll grab in on it."

"Ain't thinking of starting off right now, are you?" Unmistakably there was a threat behind that query.

"Anybody going to stop me if I do?" probed Armstrong, apprehensively anxious to know the worst.

"A popular feller hadn't ought to be in too much of a hurry to leave good friends," returned the man, twisting his countenance into a sneering smile.

Armstrong walked on. He was on thin ice, and he knew it. He had been vaguely afraid, and now his fears deep-

ened. He pressed his elbows against a strip of folded canvas swathed around his waist under his shirt. The bulkiness was no longer comforting; he felt as if he were clasped by a dangerous snake, and he suddenly wanted to be rid of it.

The hint from the grouchy man had been about enough. But Armstrong was minded to test the situation by action. He strolled toward the fringe of the forest. A man in a group called sharply to him, and he swung about and obeyed the summons. He sensed the menace behind the bland expressions assumed by the men in this second coterie.

"Armstrong, what was that funny story you were telling to a bunch the other evening—the one about the Swede? They say you're a hot one with the lingo."

He felt not a bit like a humorist at that moment. But he told the story. He tried to allay suspicion by acting as if his time were theirs. They pressed him for other stories, slapping his back. He lingered with them until he was able to seize an opportunity to go away while they were laughing.

HE circled slowly for a time, swinging in wider arcs to the forest's edge. He tried to be innocently aimless. He could not determine very well, but the scattered groups did not seem to be looking his way. Most of the men of the crew were in the clearing; the paymaster's visit had given them a three-hour respite—from midafternoon till the supper call. Already the autumn twilight was deepening.

Armstrong decided to take a chance and to march straight in among the trees; that swathing belt around his waist seemed more than ever like a serpent.

But he whirled in his tracks when somebody called his name. "Come over here!" The summoner was one of a group of watchful men in the middle of the clearing. Armstrong felt obliged to go to them, his fears goading him. He walked away from the haven of the trees, losing all the advantage he had gained by his long and cautious sortie.

With an ironic affection of comradely interest, the man who called to him said:

"The word has been passed that the boss is going to make a stump speech before supper, Armstrong. We didn't want you to miss it."

"I don't give a hoot for speeches!" This persistent baiting was "getting" him, and his taut nerves twanged in his tones.

"But we've all got to be polite to the boss!"

It was the play of the cat with the mouse. He perceived it with increasing dread and resentment. Then the men of the group sidled here and there, and he found himself surrounded.

After a few minutes Armstrong broke in on the desultory conversation. "I can hear that speech just as well if I'm over there with that trapper fellow. I want to pump him some more about his business."

He elbowed past the men and went over to the stump where Corlick was sitting. They did not try to restrain him, at least not with concerted effort; and the stump was safely removed from the fringe of the forest.

"I didn't expect it so soon," confided Armstrong, growling his words in a worried undertone. "I feel it coming mighty sudden. You've got to stand by!"

Corlick was puzzled. He had seen nothing bodeful—only some aimless straggling about—some rather complimentary attentions to Armstrong, so it had appeared.

In a little while a man, distinguished by a hard hat and a white collar, as somebody apart from the herd of toilers, came out of the office camp and mounted a stump.

"This is pay day, and you've all got more money in your hands, and it's time for some kind of a show-down in these camps, men! Take better care of it. There are thieves in camp—maybe only one thief. But he has been busy. I get complaints from losers every day. I may as well come right out with what I've been told. Some men have been doing some sleuthing. I can't say that they've caught anybody dead to rights. If they had done so, I wouldn't be called on to make this talk. But they think they have a line on a certain man."

"Lord!" muttered Armstrong.

He had been nervously working with his fingers, loosing the swathing canvas around his waist. He gave over that business instantly; men were turning their heads and were centering their gaze on him.

"Meet me in it. It's got to be quick work." He shot the words like pellets, in an undertone, at the blinking man on the stump.

Then Armstrong, evidently paying no attention to anything except his own affair with the stranger, yelled stridently:

"You're a liar!" He trimmed the accusation with coarse oaths. He muttered, in an aside, so that only the amazed Corlick could hear: "Hop up—come back—make a pass at me! For the love of Mike, get busy!" Immediately he raised his voice again and cursed Corlick.

PLAINLY the exigency was extreme.

Corlick, at a loss to understand, was willing to accommodate one in such need of help. Furthermore, he did not relish the abuse; his fighting spirit was stirred.

He leaped off the stump and struck his attacker in the face. As a come-back, Armstrong knocked Corlick down and fell on the prostrate man. While they struggled together, rolling over and stirring a veiling cloud of dust, Armstrong took advantage of the situation.

He twitched the canvas belt off his waist and stuffed it down inside Corlick's shirt, the loose neckband affording an opportunity.

Men came running, commanded by the boss. They yanked Armstrong off his victim, whom he straddled, pummeling the stranger with mock violence.

"How do you get that way?" demanded the choleric boss, when the attacker had been dragged in front of him. "Beating up a peaceable stranger in this camp!"

"He made the first pass," mumbled Armstrong sullenly.

Within he was feeling particularly content; that affray must surely have diverted all suspicion from the other man as being any sort of an accomplice.

"But not till your devilish tongue stirred him up to do it! And I wouldn't

have let anybody mix in if *he* had been whaling the stuffing out of *you!*"

The men who had seized upon Armstrong had immediately begun to paw him over roughly. They were continuing their investigations even under the eyes of the boss.

"Go ahead!" ordered the latter. "Make it a thorough job while you're at it."

Armstrong cursed, struggled and resisted. The captors welcomed the resistance as a spur to their rancor, arising from past suspicions. They buffeted the captive; they tore his shirt off his shoulders; they pulled out the pockets of his trousers. But they found only the money in his pay envelope, and then returned it with grumpy reluctance.

"I know what this means," shouted Armstrong, making a fine pretense of insulted innocence. "You've been talking about a thief. You're picking on *me*."

"And it's no kind of a wild guess, my man!" returned the boss stoutly. "I'll say, we expected to find the goods on you."

"And *now* what, seeing you haven't?" queried Armstrong, with angry insolence.

"Oh, we'll have to declare a recess, I reckon," said the unconvinced boss. "Hands off, boys! Let the critter range."

"And I'll *range*, all right!" blustered Armstrong. "Where this job is concerned, I'm washing up!"

"But if you try to walk out of this camp till we make up our minds on what's what, you'll get another drubbing," returned the boss significantly. "You seem to be a wise one, and a word to the wise is more than enough, they say. *I* say so, anyway!" He jumped down off the rostrum of the stump and marched over to Corlick. "Sorry one of my men tackled you, stranger. Some kind of old trouble between you?"

"No, sir. I never saw him till to-day."

"Then what was all the row about?"

"I don't just know, sir," stated Corlick meekly. "But he tried to pump me about my trapping and my profits, and I told him there was no more room for trappers in the North Country where I work."

"Got a good thing of your own, and you want to keep it for yourself, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I made a nice clean-up on my line of traps last winter and hope to do well again." Corlick was acutely conscious of the bulge inside his shirt and was planting something for his own salvation, in case any more shirt ripping should be taken up for a camp pastime.

"Well, we owe you a night's lodging and your supper and breakfast, son. That's settlement for the hanging you got just now."

"Excuse me, sir, but it seems easy to pick fights with strangers here. I'd rather stay by myself. Will you let me build a bit of a cook fire over in a corner of the clearing? I carry my own grub." He patted his duffel bag.

"Help yourself!" proffered the boss amiably. "And I don't need to tell a real woodsman how to keep his fire all safe." He went away about his own affairs.

Later, those who glanced over at the flicker of fire in a corner of the clearing perceived merely that a woodsman was slicing his bacon, and they took no special interest.

Corlick did slice his bacon. But, after the supper call was sounded with the cook's horn, and the crew had flocked into the dining camp, Corlick used his sharp knife and did certain things to the paper money that he found in the canvas belt.

His wits of a crook were as sharp as his knife. He saw a way to put something over on another crook, with a whole crew banded on his side and helping him in his job. And, most essential thing of all, Corlick wanted to have that other crook so hobbled in actions that the double crosser could get away without a revengeful trailer on his heels. The chap who called himself Jack Armstrong had killed his man, so he boasted! Corlick was shying away from any more blood stuff. He grinned when he pondered on the better way.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOOMERANG.

HOWEVER, there were two stranger guests at the board in the Damaris camps that evening, though Corlick had declined such hospitality.

Coming down Damaris Lake, passing

under the lofty spans of the gigantic bridge, Justice Zenas Whitman had again impressed upon Attorney Jason Brickett and on the two guides the imperative need of minding their tongues and their eyes so that his position might be kept secret. The two canoes were driving along closely, side by side.

The judge was saying:

"My 'incog' must be kept inviolate, and after two weeks in the big woods I'm wild enough—confound you all!—to put bullets into your legs if you betray me. I want to study that bunch of men herded at the camps. I expect to find dozens who have been paroled by the prison board. I have privately condemned the board for foolish leniency. I intend to see for myself how the system is working."

The judge rubbed his palm over his scrubby, new beard with satisfaction. If no foolish deference were shown by his companions, his complacent trust in his incognito, he felt, would be justified. He drilled them on the name of "White; but, to be on the safe side, he instructed Brickett to call him "Doc."

The boss of the Damaris camps greeted them hospitably when they applied at the office camp for food and shelter. Brickett, practicing sedulously, was sticking onto his companion the name of Doc at every opportunity.

The boss pricked up his ears. "I don't know which we're needing most at this camp right now—a judge or a doctor. A sneak thief and a sick man—we've got 'em both. How about a little dosing?"

"I'm not a physician," snapped the judge curtly. "I'm a dentist."

"Well, we've got some cases of toothache."

His honor was distinctly irritated. "If you want me to shoot a tooth out with this rifle, I'll do it. I have no other instrument with me."

They were standing on the porch of the office camp. In the silence of the dusk Judge Whitman's voice carried far.

Bart Corlick had heard that unmistakable voice too recently in court not to recognize its harsh rasp. An angry judge had used that tone in dressing down a jury; it had been the last sound a killer

had heard in the courtroom; it had rung in his ears ever since.

"Of all men!" exclaimed Corlick in a half whisper. He had swathed the canvas belt next to his skin under his shirt. Now for him, as it had been for Armstrong, it was a thing hateful, dangerous, dismaying. His first impulse was to tear it off his person and throw it away, to be picked up by the first person who came along.

But he had been handling and fondling those bank notes—so many of them. They had fairly warmed his hands, and the glow had spread to his avaricious heart. He had come into that clearing with empty pockets, faced by the horrid prospect of hard toil to keep himself from starving in the woods. Now, his scheme, constantly growing more plausible and promising, was pledging all sorts of comforts and pleasures. Already he had told himself that he would hurry over the border into Quebec Province, where a man could buy gurgles from bottles.

BUT his thoughts cleared after his first scare, when he heard the ominous voice. After all, as he had been figuring on the matter, his great scheme involved getting back into Armstrong's possession that money in its canvas belt. Corlick had planned that much before the arrival of the justice. Now that Judge Whitman had been injected into the situation, Corlick would be serving two purposes in getting rid of the cash, he reflected.

The sheriff had told Corlick of an intention to inform the judge of the discharged prisoner's good resolve and of his planned destination in the North Country. It would be just like that hostile judge to inquire if a man of Corlick's description were in camp. Corlick was afraid he would not be able to win off under those hard eyes and that questioning tongue—not if he had the consciousness of that swathing belt and its incriminating contents. He certainly would be damned by having that money—so much of it—and so soon after being turned out of jail. He loosed the belt. He intended to throw it away, in case the

judge, after prompt inquiries, should come looking for him that evening.

Corlick squatted beside his little fire for a long time.

Then his heart leaped jubilantly. The judge came out of the dining camp, loudly announcing to his companion that he was almighty tired and intended to pound his ear on a pillow as soon as he was able to waddle to a bunk.

No danger, then, from the dreaded inquisitor that night. Nevertheless, the other and the primal reason for ridding himself of the belt, getting it back into the possession of Armstrong, was still urging Corlick to desperate action.

And, from the door of the guest camp, Judge Whitman had called to his guide: "Give us a daybreak call, Jim!"

No danger, either, on the morrow, so Corlick's self-congratulation assured him. The justice undoubtedly intended to be up and away, and no judicial recognition and doubts would be tripping the plot, as it concerned the money.

It was plain enough how touchy was the position of Armstrong in the crew, even if no money had been found on him. Corlick knew how strenuously the fellow would fight against having the cash handed to him at this time, and the conspirator could not help chuckling at the idea of a chap like Armstrong declining a wad of greenbacks. No polite proffer of it, even secretly, would prevail, and there was no opportunity for arguing the matter. Too many ears—too constant espionage. Corlick scouted cautiously when the men came out from supper. Armstrong, it was still evident, was even more like a mouse beleaguered by watchful cats.

There was no time to waste. Men were already organizing poker parties. It was revealed to Corlick that poker was permitted in camp on pay-day nights, in the way of contenting restless men who had little else for amusement in those wilds. He had been figuring on such a contingency. When he had first entered the clearing he had heard the money counters making jocose boasts about what they would clean up that evening.

In this exigency Corlick did not try to invent; he merely proceeded to use

the same trick that had been employed successfully by Armstrong. The men, he knew, would find his actions perfectly natural—a come-back by a chap who had been insulted and assaulted.

In fact, they yelled encouragement and gave Corlick full swing when he rushed out of the shadows and attacked Armstrong furiously, knocking him flat and falling on him before the victim could manage any defense. The darkness made the job easy for Corlick—the quick shift of the canvas belt inside the shirt collar. Armstrong had his money back before he realized what Corlick was about.

The men, crowding and elbowing to make a wide circle, were howling more loudly.

Under that barrage of bellowing, Corlick said in Armstrong's ear: "It's all there! Now see if you can keep it."

He drove in a few sidewinder blows with both fists; then he leaped off Armstrong and retreated in the shadows. The men gave the victor three cheers. They did not allow Armstrong to break out of the circle and follow the other.

Bawled a spokesman:

"It now stands fifty-fifty, and the two of you are all washed up on that job. And you're now goin' to sit in at the game, Armstrong—see?"

"I'm going to bed."

"If you do, you'll have a couple of keepers with you. And that'll spile the evenin' for good fellers hankerin' for poker. Better be a good feller yourself and sit in," he advised significantly. "It's what comes of your bein' so pop'lar!"

Armstrong was as veritably a prisoner as though chains had been welded on him. He knew it. He was rushed along into the dining camp, muttering. The bull cook and his helpers had cleared the tables; in groups of five and six the men seated themselves on benches and began their play.

AFTER a time, Corlick sidled into the dining room, making no sound in his moccasins. The absorbed men paid no attention to him when he passed unobtrusively from group to group, standing and watching the various hazards of the game. Armstrong was the only player

who was uncomfortably aware of the presence of the silent observer.

Plainly, the thief, with the damning money back on his person, was having hard work to keep his mind on the cards. He was losing steadily and cursed soulfully about his bad luck. He bored Corlick with savage looks.

Every little while Armstrong deserted a group of players and went to another, and he was allowed to go without protest and was received ungraciously. His presence was unwelcome; but keeping him engaged and in sight was manifestly a settled policy with the crew, and the men put up with his actions.

As often as Armstrong moved, Corlick followed and kept up his espionage. Armstrong, rattled, distraught, angry, swore at this persistent leech and called him a hoodoo.

"Look here, Mister Trapper Man," invited one of the players at last, "better take a hand."

"I work too hard for my money to lose it gambling."

"Well, we work hard for *ours*, don't we?"

"There's a real reason why I hang onto my money. I have a poor mother who's blind," lied Corlick, managing to get a quaver into his tones. "There's a great surgeon who asks big fees. I hope he'll be able to make my poor mother see me again. That's why I've been working like a dog, all alone in the woods."

Men glanced up at him, showing sympathy.

"Oh, that's different!" said a spokesman. "Let's hope God'll be good to a man that's good to his mother. Boys, we ought to kitty out of the big jack pots and——"

The harsh voice of Armstrong broke in. Corlick's whining lie had exasperated the thief who was now in new peril. He did not pause to consider how his savage indifference would affect these men in their mood of maudlin condolence. "Tend to the game! I'm calling your hand, Durkee."

He slapped a bill on the table and held his palm on the money, while men vociferously cursed him.

Corlick acted swiftly. He pulled his knife and drove down its blade, pinning the bank note to the table. Narrowly he missed impaling Armstrong's hand; as it was, the knife gashed one of the sprawled fingers. Armstrong yelled, sucked the wound, and wrapped his handkerchief around the finger, while the men stared.

Immediately Corlick stepped back, away from the table.

"Look at that money, all you men!" His voice was shrill. To stress the full effect he got a sob into his tones: "It's mine. It's marked by me—I marked all my money because I was afraid of what might be done to me. I ain't used to the world outside the woods. I nicked the corners. I doubled the bills and cut a little square out of the middle. Look! You'll see!"

"I'll be hung, if he ain't right!" stated a man after inspection. "I ain't surprised. He frisked you. He's a sneak thief. He's been doing other men in this camp."

Men leaped up and came crowding around. There was a chorus of voices. The boss came running into the dining camp.

"How do you think anybody's going to get his sleep? No matter if it is Sunday to-morrow, I need my sleep. I've been letting you play cards on your word to be quiet about it."

"Armstrong frisked this trapper man. Must have happened in the rough-and-tumble!" stated one of the crew. A babble of voices supplied the boss with further details. He bent over the table and gave a long stare at the pinned greenback.

THEN he yanked Armstrong to his feet and went over him ruthlessly and roughly. He pulled the canvas belt from the inside of Armstrong's shirt and made sure that it was packed with money—bills marked exactly like the greenback on the table. "You dirty thief," raged the boss. "Here, you—some of you men! Hustle this renegade to the store camp and bar him in. And look you, Armstrong, you're going to show me to-morrow where you've hidden the other money

stolen from my crew, even if I put a torch to your bare feet to make you tell."

The accused man raved incoherently for a time. Then he choked himself into silence. He was in a way to betray a secret which would damn him in that crowd of infuriated men. He was inviting a lynching, he realized, if he told the truth.

When they dragged him away, he centered all his malignancy in the stare which he gave Corlick. The latter had resumed his practiced demeanor of bland simplicity; outwardly he was serenely pleased, though pangs of fear tortured him inwardly. Armstrong's eyes in his contorted visage had promised furious revenge.

After the accused had been dragged out of the room, Corlick meekly appealed to the boss. "May I take my money, sir? I want to walk on my way—now—to-night. I'm anxious to get to my poor mother."

He had put out his hand entreatingly, as he walked toward the table.

But the boss clamped his big fingers around the belt. "Nothing doing on the get-away, my man! You've got to face Armstrong as a witness."

The rosy colors faded out of Corlick's immediate future. The plot had been tripped. He had calculated on his accusation penning Armstrong for a time—giving the accuser his opportunity to get far and safely away, over the border.

It came to him now, in a surge of disgust, that he had made his plot too complicated; he should have run away with the money after Armstrong had forced it on him. But it had seemed better to set a whole crew against the man.

Corlick, plotting, after he squatted beside his fire, had apprehended that the edge of their suspicious animus against Armstrong might be dulled in the night, after they had canvassed the matter of his coming clean through the first search of his person. In that case, Armstrong, a savagely bad man, would be on the trail with the ferocity of a tiger, as soon as he could escape from a slackened guardianship.

Corlick's fears became more acute when the boss added: "There's only your

word about this money, so far. The markings help you a lot, of course. But I'll have to look up your record, and so forth, my man. In the meantime"—the boss doubled the belt and stuffed it into his pocket—"I'll have to lock you up in the back room of the office camp. We'll wait till morning and get daylight on the thing."

He took Carlick by the arm and marched him to the place of detention.

Passing the guest camp, the prisoner *de facto* heard the differing keys of the lusty snoring of two men. They were, he knew, the district attorney and the honorable justice from whom he had escaped through a jury's prejudiced opinion. In the back room Corlick whined like an animal caged.

"Don't worry!" advised the boss bluffly. "This is all for your own good in the end. Don't worry!"

But Corlick sat on the side of his bunk through most of the long night, and he *did* worry until his brain reeled.

CHAPTER IV.

JUDGMENT KNOB.

WITH the dawn Justice Whitman and Attorney Brickett arose, intending to have their guides make breakfast for them somewhere down the road, on the way to a day's sport.

On the evening before, all of a sudden, the judge had sent down a decision regarding that day of sport—their last day in the big woods. All at once he had made up his mind to stay at Damaris another twenty-four hours.

Brickett had already killed his deer and was quietly a braggart over his success. The justice had missed a couple of likely targets and was not reconciled to failure.

In the morning, in front of the office camp, Judge Whitman restated his reasons for the stay-over.

"I'm going to give my eyes and my hands one more test," he informed the lawyer. "If I'm too old to come into the woods again, I want to make sure of the mournful truth. I heard men at the supper table talking about a buck and two does hanging around a swamp.

near here. I'll make a last try. And then I'll put in a part of the afternoon and the evening making my study of the crew, on the sly."

"Going to take an extra chance on that incog, judge?" quizzed the other, grinning, his tones cautiously muted.

"How—extra chance?"

The attorney reminded the judge, still in jest, of the latter's promise to the sheriff to give one Bart Corlick a special and searching inspection.

"Oh, that was when I was on edge by the conduct of the young scalawag. Now, of course, he'll be sure to recognize me. And the thing isn't worth wasting time on—nor on that bridge over there. We've seen enough of *that*."

Boss Warner sauntered out of the office camp, habitually an early riser; he was just in time to hear the visitor making disparaging mention of the bridge, looming in the distance, propped high over the lower arm of the lake.

"I reckon city men see so many big sights, a bridge or two ain't nothing extra in their lives," remarked Warner, filling his pipe for his early smoke. "But I've been thinking on a matter, and I've made up my mind to pull off something to-day, and it may be a queer enough thing to interest even city men. You won't ever see nothing like it down where you come from. Know anything special about courts and trials?"

"Not a thing, thank goodness!" the justice hastened to put in, forestalling emphatically by his falsehood any betraying blunder by the attorney.

"A mix-up over a wad of money happened in camp last night, gents. I'm sure stumped as to what or which in the case. So, I'm going to use my whip hand as boss of this camp and turn the puzzle over to somebody else, on a chance."

"Not to us! Not to *me*!" snapped the judge, believing naturally that his identity had been probed. "Not on your life!"

"Who said anything about leaving it to *you*? You may be able to tinker teeth, but you don't look to me as if you could see much farther down into a man than his back grinders!"

Brickett opened his mouth to laugh. The glowering stare of the judge restrained the attorney. Brickett spun around, walked off a few paces, and caroled a popular song.

Warner paid no attention to the antics of Brickett; most city men were rather silly, the boss opined.

Gravely in earnest, Warner addressed the judge. "I dunno as how I believe in mind reading and all that stuff. But do you see that knob of rock, over yonder?" He pointed to a pinnacle showing above the trees. "There's a queer man lives all alone up there—a kind of hermit. There's always a row of some kind here in camp. My men go up there reg'lar and leave their troubles to that hermit. No courts handy around here, you know. The men say he seems to see right into 'em. They all take his word on things, and the fuss is settled after he talks. Better'n most law courts can do, eh?"

Judge Whitman grunted, curbing Brickett's emotions by a scowl.

Warner briefly gave the details of the situation that had arisen in Damaris camps. "And I'm going to take them two critters and my men up onto Judgment Knob, as we call the peak. It'll help to pass away a Sunday afternoon, at any rate. Better take in the show, gents. The climb is a mite tough, but the trail is plain, and you can make it easy if you take an easy gait. It may be worth your while to see justice without the law trimmings."

"So you think men get justice up there, eh?" queried the judge, interest flickering up from his somber severity.

"Only can say as how my men always come down, seeming to be all satisfied."

Judge Whitman stared at the peak. Then he walked over to the attorney and spoke in his ear. "Brickett, we seem to have tumbled onto something up here that's more interesting than a big bridge, for men in our line. It even kills my interest in a buck deer, just now. Tell the guides they can have a day to loaf. You and I are going up onto Judgment Knob." There was a touch of sarcasm in his tones, but keen interest lighted his eyes.

After breakfast, the judge and the attorney lounged about the camp for a

time. They decided to walk on ahead of the boss and his crew, in order to make the ascent of the knob in the leisurely fashion fitted to their limited endurance.

Warner pointed out the trail, and the two set off.

CHAPTER V.

THE RECLUSE ON THE HILL.

THE judge and the attorney were somewhat impressed by the appearance of the recluse of Judgment Knob, after slow and labored progress had brought them, perspiring and panting, to the summit of the peak. He conveyed an impression of dignity, even though there seemed to be eccentric affectation in the unshorn shagginess of his grizzled hair and beard.

He wore no hat. His garb was nondescript, wrinkled and much worn. His skin was browned by exposure, but his features and manner were not those of a woodsman.

He was sitting in a splint chair, just outside the door of his hut, and betrayed no emotion of any sort when he beheld his visitors. He returned their salutations gravely and invited them to take a seat on a bench near him.

Recovering his breath, Judge Whitman took full visual account of the hermit, and then his eyes strayed to a board nailed above the door. He read carefully the inscription painted on the board:

"Welcome to all who come in the spirit of honesty and justice. But I pray those who deal in evil to pass on their way and leave my little home to its peace."

"Will you kindly favor us with your name?" asked Brickett in his courtroom manner.

"I have put away my name as a useless thing, and I am not interested in the names of those who come here." The man spoke sharply, and a disquieting glare in his eyes suggested an unstable temper.

That uncompromising reply put a damper on speech for some time. Then the recluse broke the silence.

"Have you brought troubles to be settled?"

The judge, frowning, turned his back and gazed out over the valley, leaving Brickett to do the talking.

"The boss down at Damaris camps told us about you. That's why we came up." He was as blunt as the hermit had been. "Call it curiosity—that's about it!"

"If it has been satisfied, you may be inclined to leave my little home to its peace."

"Beg pardon, but we really expect to satisfy our curiosity by sticking around for a while. The boss is coming up here with his men in order to settle a fuss. My friend and I would like to see you do what you're advertised as doing."

"You are welcome to stay."

It was condescension without politeness, and Brickett was visibly irritated. "How do you happen to set yourself up as a judge between men?"

"I do not ask men to come here. I would rather they'd stay away. But when they come I always give them justice!"

"Why, look here, even the wisest judges can't deal out justice—not every time."

"No, not in a court of law. The lawyers and the juries interfere."

Judge Whitman twisted impatiently, Brickett snapped a sarcastic demand.

"And you think your methods are better, do you?"

"I think the best way is for each man to decide for himself the amount of injury that has been done to him by another, then go ahead and collect his due, whether it's money or blood!"

Justice Whitman remembered the framed apothegm by Francis Bacon. Highly offended by the recluse's crude iconoclasm, the judge swung to face the man and said sharply:

"That's merely revenge!"

"Sir, it's only arriving at the same result by a shorter way, without running the risks of miscarriages in law courts and without paying over a lot of money to lawyers in cases where man ought to deal directly with man."

"If you're advising parties to handle their affairs that way, you're a dangerous meddler," insisted the justice with heat.

"Nevertheless, I shall continue, as men come to me for help."

"Let me tell you this. If you counsel men to deal in unlicensed revenge, you're flinging a boomerang. It will swing around and hurt you."

The angry judge arose and walked away to the edge of the cliff where he sat on a boulder, composing himself. Brickett joined the judge after a few moments.

"I didn't dare trust myself to talk with that old nincompoop any longer," confided the attorney. "I agree with you. He'll advise somebody who'll get awfully hurt, and that somebody will come back here and take it out on the adviser."

Judge and prosecutor soothed their professional resentment with tobacco and resolved to remain aloof from the man who had offended them and to whom they dared not talk more emphatically as defenders of law and the courts, fearing lest ardor might betray their identity.

The recluse paid no attention to them. So the three waited for those who were to come, bringing a knotted skein of human trouble.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO HORNS OF A DILEMMA.

AFTER the party had arrived, Boss Warner stated the case to the hermit of Judgment Knob. On that little plateau, in the silence above the hushed forest, his voice carried far, and the judge and the attorney were able to hear all without leaving their seats on the boulder where they were posted.

Brickett's curiosity prompted him to stare at the group of men grouped around the unofficial judge. Judge Whitman resolutely kept his face turned away, looking down into the valley. He was not running the risk of chance recognition by any one in the crowd, now that the sun's glare was lighting his features.

Warner had started to break a rule of Judgment Knob, a restriction which his men understood better than he. First of all, he pointed at the pair who had been held as hostages of the truth. "I don't know whether these names are their right one, but——"

"I want no names. I never deal with

names. I deal with men, as they stand before me. Which one accuses?"

Corlick was allowed by his guardians to step forward a few paces.

"How did you earn the money you claim as yours?" demanded the referee.

Corlick, working himself into fervid emotion, described the hardships of a trapper's life.

The observant Brickett squinted his eyes and peered sharply. The fellow's garb, his tanned features, the story into which he put all his desperate eagerness to convince—these elements were deceiving Brickett for the moment. But all at once the attorney blurted:

"Torches of Tophet! Judge, that's our man—Bart Corlick!"

The justice did not turn to look. "A jury distinctly took him out of our possession, Brickett. I repudiate any ownership. Turn your back, as I'm doing. We must keep out of this muddle."

Just then the hermit sharply checked the reciter of woes. Then he walked over to where the two from the law courts were sitting.

"I'd like to have a word in private with you, sir," he informed Judge Whitman. "It's important."

Brickett rose instantly, in deference to his superior. "I'll step aside."

When the lawyer was at a safe distance, the recluse said:

"That's exactly what I feel like doing, in the case now on trial, sir. It has occurred to me suddenly that I'm presuming too far."

"Why?" demanded the judge. "This is your tribunal—Judgment Knob," he added, with a flash of irony.

"But I should defer to you, sir, asking you to preside, as my judicial superior—Justice Zenas Whitman, of the supreme court!" But there was no placating humility in the hermit's mien.

A few expletives of disgust and resentment got past the judge's guard. "You are mistaken!"

"Oh, no! I knew who you were the moment your head showed above the ledge. I have good reason to remember you, sir, even though it was twenty years ago when I sat in the prisoner's dock in front of you, while you charged a jury,

demanding, so far as your judicial ethics would permit, my conviction for murder in the first degree."

The judge had previously glanced up at the man. Now the sudden glance of his astonished eyes lengthened into a stare. The declaration had been phrased rather stolidly in the idiom of an educated man.

"What's your name?" It was a hasty, blunt demand.

"A mere name, sir, would be but a dim reminder, after so many years. A man, and more especially the affair of that man, may serve better. A certain base hound broke up a college professor's home and took the couple's young son into the depths of corruption. The husband searched for and killed the vile thief. The slayer faced you and a jury. You dealt with the law; the jury gave me justice."

"I remember the case, of course. The names escape me."

The hermit smiled in mild triumph.

"I thought probably you would. Names are only confusing tags on the many miserable men and women who filed before you through so many years. No more about myself. I was justified by my acquittal. Again I say, I defer to you as an honored judge." He bowed politely, but there was a hint of mockery in his tones, and the other bridled and scowled when the recluse added: "Will you preside here to-day?"

"You're talking nonsense, my man. A justice of the supreme judicial court of this State cannot lend himself to any such irregular proceedings. And I counsel you to turn these parties over to a court of law."

"They have offered themselves to judgment on this peak to-day. *You* decline—I shall serve."

The judge turned a scornful back.

This mute disdain, more scathing than words, affected the recluse galvanically. He beat upon his breast and shouted, venting emotions which he had been suppressing:

"I see the truth, as it is, in men! I don't juggle with law subtleties. I deal out justice. *I am Justice!*"

He started away, but the judge

checked him by a sharp command. When the man stepped back, the justice lowered his tones.

"No more about yourself, say you? Well, how about that child—that young son I gave into your keeping, to save him from the dangerous influence of an unworthy mother? I'm proving to you, please note, that my memory of events is still alive and healthy, in spite of your sneer about my recollection of names."

"You gave me what I did not ask for—did not want. I don't know what became of the child. I refused to concern myself with the son of an unworthy mother." He bared his teeth and swung about once more, to go back to his self-assumed duties.

In wrath, which he felt to be righteous, the outspoken judge vented an opinion, brutally frank.

"Confound you! What's your name? Out of your revenge you're due to get a good mouthful, and it will make you mighty sick. Take that from me as solid truth. I've tested that truth as a judge, on the bench for thirty years."

Once more the hermit bowed low. But there was even more mockery in his obeisance than in his spoken words, when he had deferred previously.

WHEN Brickett returned to the side of the judge, the arbiter of Judgment Knob was asking Corlick how the latter had saved his money, earned by his hard toil.

The attorney had his irony ready, taking his cue from the declaration so recently shouted by the hermit.

"They do say that Truth is to be found at the bottom of a well, judge, but I never reckoned we'd find Justice, walking on two legs, on this mountain peak. Say, that man is a lunatic—only needing the right kind of a poke to set him off into tantrums."

"One of your alien experts might not give him a clear bill, I'll admit, Brother Brickett," said the jurist dryly. "A plain case of the danger of isolation and too much introspection."

Judge Whitman did not volunteer any explanation of what the recluse had sought in the private interview. Brickett

was inclined to be rather too talkative. The judge chose to respect the hermit's admissions as a confidence intrusted to the court. The elimination of the attorney from the conference had been at the request of the hermit and sufficiently signified the latter's wishes as to secrecy. Furthermore, both men, sitting apart from the assemblage, had their attention fully occupied by Corlick's statement of his case.

Already, the evening before, the rogue had rehearsed his false story about a blind mother. In the exigency of this second occasion, he did even better; he squeezed out a dribble of tears.

"The liar!" exploded Armstrong, unable to restrain his fury.

One of the guards, moved to renewed sympathy for a stricken mother, cuffed Armstrong soundly and cursed him.

"Silence!" thundered the hermit. "You, man—you who accuse this other of falsehood—to what good use were you putting the money, if it really belonged to you?"

Armstrong stammered unintelligibly, shrinking from the guard's hand, raised again to smote.

The boss, custodian of the canvas belt, shook it over his head.

"He was playing poker with it!"

"Did you come at so much so easily, that you were willing to risk it in gaming?" demanded the one sitting in judgment.

Men roared in angry chorus their suspicions and their accusations in regard to Armstrong.

With the quick gamester's estimate of the situation, Armstrong was ready to fling down "a dead hand." He could not allow his fury any rein in a counter charge; by incriminating Corlick, the accuser would be damned; and that mob was in a mood to heave him off the cliff.

From where he was standing, Armstrong could peer through the hermit's open door. A rifle was leaning against the wall, just inside the jamb.

He felled one guard with a blow, toppled over another with the force of his catapulting body, and reached the weapon. He fired one shot, when the

crowd rushed at him. The bullet hit the ledges and glanced off at a tangent.

"I'll bore somebody with the next one!" yelled Armstrong.

The men halted, and he leaped to the edge of the cliff and faced them.

"I mean business!" he declared in an hysterical croak.

The boss put up his hands and herded back his vociferous crew.

"Take no chances with him, boys! There's poison in him, as he stands!"

"There's only one man I'm going to deal with," exclaimed Armstrong. "That's you, 'Killer' Corlick!" He came out brutally with name and accusation. "I'm going to get you—and what belongs to me—*both*!" In his rage he was not curbing his tongue. "I'll get you before morning. I don't care how dark the night, is, I'll find you, even if I have to borrow a searchlight."

HE backed away down the cliff and disappeared, the rifle aimed to warn possible pursuers. His voice came to them: "Even if I have to borrow a searchlight!"

"Why has he called you Killer Corlick?" demanded Warner, turning a puzzled stare on the young fellow.

"He's a liar. It's his last try to put me in wrong."

"Names are easily bandied to a man's hurt," stated the hermit, with severity. "The man who has gone offered no honest plea. He has confessed by words and actions that he is a renegade and a cheat."

"Then this other one gets the jack, does he?" queried Warner.

"It is his, and for a good purpose, so he claims, and his sincerity goes far in proving it."

"All right! It was agreed upon as how we'd leave it all to you." The boss tossed the canvas belt to the claimant, who caught it.

"Good Cephas!" exclaimed Brickett in the judge's ear. "We mustn't let that young scoundrel get away with this."

But the justice shook his head, set in his stubborn resolution to remain incognito, where Warner and his men were concerned. "We must keep out of the

mess, Brickett. It's stolen money—a row between two thieves. We can get nowhere by trying to untangle the thing at this time."

Warner was leading his men slowly down the cliff. All of them could see the fugitive leaping on his way, from terrace to terrace; he disappeared into the forest that encompassed the peak, like a green sea isolating an isle. Corlick, standing in his tracks, looked at the backs of the two men whom he knew and feared. But when he turned his blinking eyes to survey the green surface of the treetops, his teeth clicked, as he realized what sort of menace was lurking there. He stammered:

"I thank you, sir, for what you've done for a poor fellow. May I go inside and rest for a while?"

In Corlick's case, it was truly a choice between the devil and the deep sea. But it would be better, he determined, to bluff out the affair with those law devils than run the chance of meeting up with the rifle and its infuriated possessor.

Warner and his men were down over the cliff, beyond the reach of the eyes of the four on the little plateau. But the voices of the party descending carried far on the woodland silence.

"Any one of you willing to take a chance on that devil being a long ways off by this time?" inquired Warner.

The hermit turned his back on Corlick and listened, deigning to give no reply to the other's appeal.

"All right!" cried the boss. "You look like the real kind of a lean horse for a race, Dickson. Go to it! Get to the camp phone. Notify every deputy sheriff you can reach. We'll get that skunk, all right. And when we have Mister Jack Armstrong back in Damaris Camp, Mister Jack Armstrong will tell us where he has hid this crew's money, if he isn't caught with it pouched on him. Otherwise, we'll burn the feet off of Mister Jack Armstrong." The voice dwelt on the name acridly.

"Sweet Cicely!" gasped the observant Brickett. "Something has sure hit the judge of Judgment Knob a wallop!"

Judge Whitman was moved by the emotion of his friend and turned his gaze

on the hermit. The man was staggering about in circles, his knees sagging.

"Get off this mountain! Get away from me!" he screamed at Corlick, who approached, proffering helpful hands.

The recluse half fell into the door and slammed the portal. There was the significant clack of a wooden bar. The judge and the attorney, alarmed, started toward the hut.

CORLICK stole glances at the men whom he feared—at the forest he feared more bitterly. His panic of the immediate present prevailed; he ran to the edge of the cliff; as soon as he was over the rim, he crawled down by slow stages, peering, hearkening, hesitating, whining his fears under his breath.

Judge Whitman went resolutely to the door and pounded with his fist. "You'd better let us in. If you've had a stroke of some kind, we'll help you in getting to a doctor!"

"Go away!" was the command in cracked tones. "How can *you* help anybody—you old flint rock?"

The judge irefully blazed back his own sort of retort, letting his tongue run loose in this new unconventionality of the woods.

"You're what I told you, you are—a dangerous fool. You've given stolen money to a renegade murderer, who was turned loose in my court only a few weeks ago, when a jury fell down on the job. You have started off that other fellow with murder in his heart. Undoubtedly there'll be serious trouble, and you can hold yourself responsible for it. Understand me, do you? This is what comes of your kind of justice on Judgment Knob—and you sneer at courts of law! You have instigated a killing. Think that over." He raised his angry eyes to the inscription on the lintel. "And don't forget to enjoy the peace in your little home. Good-by, and be damned to you."

With Brickett at his heels, Judge Whitman stamped away over the ledges and began the descent. The two men of the law saw nothing of Corlick.

He had gone to one side of the trail and was cowering in a narrow niche,

which erosion had hollowed in the cliff. He peered at the tops of the trees below him—that unrevealing expanse, beneath which must be lurking a man with revenge in his heart and a rifle in his hands. Corlick shivered. The unseen was getting him and he realized it. There would be instant peril if he ventured in daylight! But the thought of the dark woods at night terrified him still more. He had been experiencing, as a tenderfoot, all the terrors of the dark woods, when there had been no distinct menace, as there was now. And the thought of Armstrong's last threat was continually with him—the words rang in his ears: "Even if I have to borrow a searchlight."

Corlick crawled around the face of the cliff, making a circuitous descent on the side opposite—away from the direction in which Armstrong had fled. Of the two horns of a dreadful dilemma, Corlick had chosen the hazards of daylight.

The man with a rifle was in a small clearing from which he could view the side of the cliff. He saw the man crawling on hands and knees—from that distance seeming like a sluggish beetle. As the slow progress of the creeping figure continued, the man with the rifle breasted through the undergrowth, gained clearing after clearing, and kept vengeful espionage.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCHLIGHT.

AFTER a time, the silence outside reassuring him, the hermit unbarred his door and emerged. The sun was low; the autumn afternoon was waning. Squinting apprehensively, muttering speech to himself after the habit of solitaires, he made a slow round of the plateau, staring long into the little clearings, peering to discover movement in the narrow aisles of the trails.

Suddenly he hurried into the hut and brought forth an old-fashioned spyglass. He rested the instrument across a boulder and studied something which called for close inspection; it was movement in the border of a distant clearing.

A man was stalking another man, who was evidently fully aware of what was

afoot. In the circle of the glass, identities were revealed by garb. Corlick's mackinaw, with broad splashes of color, distinguished him. Armstrong's plain, faded denim offered unmistakable contrast.

The two men were dodging from cover to cover. Every little while, one or both were lost to the view of the man on the peak. Several times he heard the crack of the rifle. Plainly Armstrong's fury was making him impatient.

The man with the spyglass, long a woodsman, knew what difficulties a moving target presented, with intervening tree trunks for shields. Immediately after each rifle crack, the mackinaw jacket reappeared, its wearer actively alert. The recluse knew the number of shells the stalker had left in the magazine of his rifle. The recluse counted aloud; at last he blurted: "That's the last one—thank Heaven."

His thanksgiving was inopportune. Immediately he was able to observe both men at once in the circlet of the glass, because denim rushed close to mackinaw, clubbing his rifle. Mackinaw dodged the swoop of the weapon, and the butt was splintered against a tree. Denim swung the steel barrel, and it slipped from hands that were doubtless wet with perspiration after prolonged physical effort.

Mackinaw leaped on the staggering figure that was regaining its balance, after that fruitless swing with the weapon. Mackinaw bore down denim, straddling the figure. There was a struggle that settled into a slow, remorseless overcoming of the figure underneath.

A shaft from the setting sun struck a flash from something held aloft at the end of the mackinaw sleeve. The arm descended, was raised, and was plunged down again, unhurried, its slow and calculated movements revealing the venom in the determination to kill. It was slaughter—the eye at the end of the spyglass made certain. The man in the mackinaw straightened and stood upon his feet; then he kicked the prostrate figure and left it where it lay in telltale inertness.

The observer on the peak drove together the segments of the telescope and

yelled into the nothingness over his head: "He has killed my son."

He steadied himself and again made use of the spyglass. The man in the mackinaw doubled forward and lunged into the brush; a few moments later he was in sight again on a trail. As soon as he set away on this narrow lane, his line of retreat was unmistakably evident; the road was in the form of an arc, skirting the peak, and led into the trail customarily followed by voyageurs headed toward the North border.

The observer on the peak snapped into instant decision; he knew all the short cuts of the region; he could easily reach the trail far ahead of the man who was traversing the long half circle of the road. But craft, instead of force, must prevail against the desperate killer. It was an old man against a young man who was desperate.

Hurrying to his hut, the recluse soliloquized after his wont, babbling speech:

"I am Justice! A man has been killed! He was my son, but he was worthless and evil. Justice is mighty, though I am weak, and Justice shall prevail."

He ran from the hut, carrying a can of kerosene and a homemade dark lantern; he had needed the latter on occasions when night had overtaken him in the forest. By the time he was down over the cliff, the sun had set, and night had massed blackness among the trees. But a pencil of light from the lantern enabled him to find sure footing and to hurry. He was still talking to himself, sinking his voice to a husky muttering.

"I am weak, but I am Justice. Justice shall prevail! My wits are keen—are quick. Better my wits than a murderer's muscle."

After a time he settled upon one dominating idea for his soliloquy, ringing changes on the thought. The son had declared to the slayer on the mountain-top: "I'll find you even if I have to borrow a searchlight."

"He was vile, but he was my son," the old man mumbled. "There shall be searchlights for the undoing of a killer. The father will furnish those lights."

In the black night, far up the trail leading to the North, the avenger lay

prone on the ground. At last his ear caught the thud of moccasined feet—the heavy steps of a man whose leg muscles had been made lax by exhaustion. In the hush of the forest the hard panting of the approaching fugitive was audible.

The man who arrogated to himself the rôle of Justice incarnate, rose and poured a small quantity of oil over a stunted spruce shrub—a resinous torch in itself. He had chosen it with care; it was safely isolated from the big trees. He touched a match to the boughs. With a shrill *wheeck*, the shrub flamed into instant radiance.

The human firebrand scuttled away on his hands and knees, and, when he was safely beyond the circle of glare, he got upon his feet and hurried along the path marked by a pencil of lantern light. As he ran, he heard a quavering bleat of astonishment behind him. Couched behind another shrub, up the trail, now the avenger was speculating whether the murderer would have the courage to come on along the trodden path.

After a time, the sagging footsteps were heard again. The stars gave a man some light in the open trail; the bordering woods were in black darkness. Plainly the fugitive was desperately taking his chances in the open path. The unbroken woods were too somber as a refuge.

Again a shrub flared. This time there was real terror in the cry of the man who was blocked, beholding this phenomenon for which he could not account.

The recluse determined to prey on superstition with more coercing effect. Copying, as best he was able, the snarl in which the slain man had voiced his threat on the peak, he rasped, for the other to hear: "Even if I have to borrow a searchlight!" Then he fled from the gloom.

CHAPTER VIII.

THROUGH TRACKLESS FORESTS.

AT once Bart Corlick surrendered to panic. He fairly hurried himself off that sinister trail, into the brush. He was afraid of the trackless forest. During his period of roughing it to acquire tan and some of the tactics of the woods,

he stuck to the vicinity of camps as closely as was prudent.

He had been timorous when he had rolled himself in his blanket, alone among the trees, hearing queer sounds, trying for his peace of mind to translate them into innocuous noises. His experiences had been in the cities and in the herds of humanity. He was prepared to credit the forest with almost anything in the way of the weird and the unusual.

Now, he had the blood of a man on his hands, literally. He had halted at a brook, but he had been in too much of a hurry to clean off all the crimson stains that had dyed his hands when he stabbed a man to death.

His conscience was not especially awake. But his new terrors were! He was not thinking! Wild fears were bubbling in a hot brain!

He did not reason when he saw a thin shaft of light off at one side—that moving pencil of radiance which wrought swift arabesques on tree trunks and foliage. He did not ascribe the spectacle to human agency. It seemed to be only more of the hellish mystery of the trackless wilds.

Superstition took full charge of his dizzy faculties. He had not been hearing a human voice, even! What man had been able to behold what had been done by Corlick so recently? What sort of a man could it be who could manage to be ahead of him now? His flight had been instant—along the one and only trail of the region. The spirit of a murdered man—with the voice and the words which had been ringing in Corlick's ears ever since Armstrong had dropped out of the sight of men, over the edge of the cliff! That was the answer. Unreasoning superstition made the thing credible, there in the awful blackness.

Taking no heed of course, direction, or obstacles, the fugitive crashed through copses, bumped against trees, fell, and arose half stunned and then staggered on. He no longer cared how much noise he made in the forest. He even yelped frenziedly, as new waves of terror surged in him. He was not betraying himself to a pursuing man. That conviction was in him! This Thing was ahead of him!

No mere man could have contrived such a heading-off!

Once more he tried to travel toward the north, as he figured the direction to be. Only in the north, across the border, would there be safety. He had money to spend there. Then, damn a ghost! He would drown a spirit in spirits!

All at once horror beset him again. In the middle of a small clearing into which he came crashing through a tangle of witch hobble another of those hell fires flared.

He shrieked and turned his back on it and went thrashing away through the undergrowth.

Now he had irretrievably lost his sense of direction. In the forest, even in broad day, the panic of a man beleaguered by trees becomes a species of lunacy, when he realizes his plight—knowing not north from south, because he doubts even the sun in the heavens. Men relate that they have cursed even a compass and have smashed it in their delirium, feeling that the dial was merely smirking and taunting them with a mute and bland falsehood! In the daylight, but more frenziedly in the night, lost men run and scream and tear themselves against brush and boughs. They are like victims who are drowning, and they struggle as madly and with as little sense as to the need of conserving effort.

Furthermore, a lost man, allowing his legs to have their will, travels in an inexorable circle. This murderer was headed back to the place from which he had come.

It was not in his distracted mind to look up the stars for guidance. As a city man, more versed in the significance of street lights as guides, he knew little about the stars. Doubtless, in any case, he would have discounted their mutely directing help, discrediting them in his panic.

But the recluse who had dwelt for so long on Judgment Knob, under the open heavens, did know the stars. Now, when the trees thinned to afford him opportunity, his quick glances over his shoulder told him all he wanted to know, no matter how much the aimless wanderings

of the fugitive tended to confuse the sense of direction.

The man who was vowed to implacable Justice, as he understood it, had resolved to be arbiter of direction. He determined to modify for his own purposes that habitual circle in which a lost man trudges. Not back to the hateful glade where a dead man lay! Such a plan was not in a father's mind. But to force that murderer to walk on his own feet to Damaris camps, where other men's strength could perform what the old man could not undertake—that was the stern purpose to which the father had summoned the spirit of relentless vengeance.

Therefore, he looked over his shoulder every little while, took his bearings from the North Star or Orion's blazing belt, and inflexibly shaped the killer's course.

When the latter, by fortuitous swerve or uncalculated precision, headed toward the north, another torch from hell blazed, a harsh voice warned again in the last words uttered by the man who had been slain.

East or west, north or south—the fleeing wretch was no longer making any effort to put his wild thoughts upon the matter of direction. He wallowed through the forest's tangle, he ran at top speed, but his powers were constantly failing. As often as some narrow trail or a clearing permitted a swifter pace, he struggled on, but lagged as if in mire.

To escape from the torches and that voice, whenever the two menaces confronted him, such constituted the sum of his frantic toil. That he was being driven irresistibly back to Damaris, where the hands of strong men would be laid on him, was not in his mind for a moment. He was conscious of only aimless wanderings.

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Please send the daylight!" he prayed, blubbering through lips torn by lancing twigs and battered by collisions with rough boles or trees.

No longer was he able to run when some open place gave him opportunity. He weaved on unsteady legs. He merely tumbled along, his knees sagging. If he halted, if he fell and lay, as if abandoning hope of escape, again a hell torch blazed, and he heard the awful voice.

He struggled up and heaved himself along. And then once more the unrelenting pursuer had the crashing of the undergrowth for his aid in keeping at his distance, while he guided himself by the stars.

CHAPTER IX.

"I AM JUSTICE."

SO, at last, while the night still shrouded all things, Bart Corlick went floundering into the Damaris clearing.

So wholly and wildly bewildered had he been as to direction and distance, he did not in the least recognize the place. He had the vague and comforting hope that he had been able to win to a destination across the border. It seemed to him that he had journeyed sufficiently far to reach such a goal. His utter weariness, near to prostration, hinted as much to him, at any rate! He fell upon his hands and knees when he entered the clearing and had perceived the dim outlines of the buildings. It was laxing of muscles, in the reaction of soul and body. He crawled on away from the fringe of the hateful forest.

The pursuer stood at the edge of the woods and waited in grim silence till his man was close to the main camp. Then the avenger yelled shrilly, addressing the dark abodes where men were sleeping. He kept up the alarm till lights showed suddenly in the windows. The door of the main camp was flung open, and Corlick, struggling along on his hands and knees, was revealed in the fan of lamp-light from the portal.

The accuser strode forward from the shadows of the trees. "Lay hands on that man! He is a murderer!"

Men, crowding into the doorway, blinked into the shadows. A spokesman asked: "Who are *you*, saying he's a murderer?"

Now near at hand, the accuser pulled back the slide of his dark lantern and directed the full glare on his features. "You can see, all of you, who I am! I am Justice! I have driven that murderer to this place!"

Corlick struggled to his feet, screaming wordlessly out of his flaming emotions.

"I saw him kill the man," persisted the recluse. His countenance in the radiance from the lantern was hard and inscrutable, creased with deep lines of solemn resolve, but his eyes flickered strangely, and there was a quaver in his tones when he added: "He stabbed to death the man John Armstrong."

"You mean Jack—Jack Armstrong—of our crew?" stammered a questioner.

As if he had partially betrayed himself by applying the formal name, and feared to show his emotions, the recluse snapped shut the lantern. "He killed the man Armstrong, who was before me on Judgment Knob some hours ago. From the peak, at sundown, I looked with my glass, and I saw the crime." It was terse, stiffly succinct accusation.

Corlick, staggering, tried to avoid the clutching hands of the men. They were convinced by what the recluse had said. He was one in whom they placed full trust. They seized upon the gasping malefactor and dragged him into the camp.

A man ran and pounded on the door of the office camp to make sure that Boss Warner was awake. Warner hurried out, jerking his suspenders over his shoulders.

Men, half dressed, were jamming at the door of the main camp; the boss thrust through the press, entering upon a silence which the sense of tragedy had imposed upon those who were waiting for vested authority to come forth and assert itself.

Corlick was in the clutch of his captors.

The recluse stood in front of the prisoner, arms folded across his breast, rigid, stern, saturnine.

"He says," spoke up one of the crowd, pointing a wavering finger at the accuser, "as how he saw this critter kill Jack Armstrong!"

"Where was the killing done?" demanded the boss, clapping palm on the hermit's shoulder and whirling him around, face to face.

"You know the Durkee clearing, don't you? Where the Tomas Brook doubles toward the dead water? It was there."

"How did you happen to spot the job?"

"I was looking through my glass. I saw it done."

"That's good enough for me! Your word goes!"

Warner snapped around on his heels and wagged a forefinger under the prisoner's nose. "And what do *you* say for yourself?"

Corlick choked. His face was working with hideous grimaces. He fairly wrrenched one word out of his mouth.

"Nothing!"

"Look here, if you've got any kind of an excuse you'd better hand it over damn sudden! This gang is apt to get almighty savage if it was murder without a good reason."

Many voices joined in a bodeful growl.

Corlick shuddered. There was menace all about him. "He tackled me!" It was a hysterical bleat. "I had to fight him off! It was a case of either me or him!"

THERE was a surging among the men near the door; they made way for two newcomers who were demanding admittance importantly, authoritatively.

Warner glanced that way, saw who they were, and loftily disregarded them. He turned to the prisoner. "You're admitting, then, that you have killed Armstrong. Your name is Barter, is it?"

The accused also disregarded the new arrivals who were thrusting past the crowd at the door. "I'm Dan Barter, no matter what anybody says. My name is Barter, and I've been trapping, like my looks show I've been!" It was dogged insistence, desperate effort to prevail over the danger that threatened him.

Attorney Brickett stepped ahead of Judge Whitman, as soon as they had won their way past the jam of men. Here was truly a case for the law—here was outrageous attempt to bluff and deceive!

"Just a moment!" blurted the lawyer. "Let's start with the truth in this thing! This man has been twice before the court on the charge of murder. I, myself, prosecuted him. I'm Jason Brickett, the district attorney of the County of Canibas. A fool jury cheated the chair in his case! He is Bart Corlick!"

Amazement hushed all. On the silence the accused squealed, still defiant, still

striving to prevail. "I swear to God that it ain't my name!"

"It's the name under which you were indicted and tried," stated the attorney relentlessly. "That's enough for the time being!"

Warner peered at the lawyer's rough garb and his unshaven face, and suspicion mingled with quick ire when the stranger assumed full charge and impatiently commanded Warner to shut up and step aside. The boss, jealous of his authority in the camp, was once more attempting to question Corlick.

"Warner, this man must not be allowed to make statements until he is calmer—until he can be questioned under the provisions of the law!" In his zeal he was incautious, no longer mindful of an incognito. "Judge, shall I order this room cleared, or do you prefer to have the prisoner removed to our camp?"

The boss was persistently impudent and reckless in his skepticism. "Judge, hey? Thought he was an old doc. Mebbe he's the king of Siam!"

The judge had begun to mumble resentfully when the attorney had voiced the betraying title. But Warner's rash sneer now torched indignation into a flame of ire.

His honor marched into the middle of the room. "A big rip you've made in an incog, Brickett! You may as well tear the whole of it off!"

"Take note, all of you!" proclaimed the attorney, taking advantage of this petulant permission. "This gentleman is Justice Zenas Whitman of the supreme court of this State. Now, my man," he addressed Warner, "mind your manners from now on and stand by to take orders. Don't try to give them."

The judge stared hard at the recluse. Silence of stupefaction held all listeners motionless and hushed.

"Word o' mouth," said the justice, "has reported a murder. But the finding and the recovery of the body must prove the accusation."

"It now stands as a case of *corpus delicti*," put in the attorney—and promptly begged his honor's pardon for presuming so officiously. "But I guess my nerves are off, may it please the court

—waked up out of a sound sleep, as I've been!"

"So I perceive!" returned the judge with severity. "But no court is in session. Warner, have you been informed as to the location of the body?"

"Yes, sir!" The boss was now apologetic and humble.

"Send men immediately to guard it where it lies until the medical examiner can get up here."

"Yes, sir!"

THE boss called several men out of the crowd, giving them orders. "And take along a telephone instrument. After you find the body, one of you hustle over to the line beyond Tomas and cut in and report. Now, hiper your boots, boys!"

This imminence of absolute condemnation drove Corlick into stuttering speech. At first he was incoherent.

The judge caught Brickett's eye and made a significant gesture.

Brickett paced forward and clapped an admonitory palm on Corlick's shoulder. "I warn you not to make any talk now."

"I've got to tell how he tackled me! It's got to be known, I tell you! And he chased me through the woods with torches from hell. After he was dead he chased me!" The man was screaming. To the listeners it seemed like the ravings of mania.

Brickett put their thoughts into rough speech. "Shut up! You've gone crazy, Corlick! Small wonder! Close your jaw, I say!" He shook Corlick into silence, the latter's teeth chattering because of the violence of the lawyer's thrusts.

"Better send your men back to their beds, Warner," said the judge. "A couple of them can handle this man if he grows worse."

"I can handle him myself," boasted the boss, stretching out his brawny arms.

His sharp commands cleared the room of his men. He slammed the door behind the stragglers and returned to Corlick. "Try any funny tricks on me, and I'll double you up and stuff you into my pants pocket. And keep your yap shut!"

Threats had prevailed; the prisoner remained motionless on the bench, where

a vigorous wrench by the boss' arm had seated him. The judge and the attorney retired to one corner of the big room and canvassed the matter in subdued tones.

The recluse of Judgment Knob, the principal witness, did not seat himself during the long wait for news. He stood beside the wall, his arms folded on his breast, directing malefic, unwavering gaze at the slayer who had been so inexorably sent, staggering and thrashing through the forest, into the hands of Justice.

CHAPTER X.

STORM SIGNALS.

AT last, when there was a hint of dawn outside the windows, a mere graying of the blackness plastered against the panes, a telephone bell whirled dully. The boss had been guarding Corlick, bending over the man, a foot propped on the bench on which the prisoner sat. Warner hurried to the wall of the camp and took down the receiver. He listened attentively.

"All right!" he commanded. "Mind your eyes and do your stuff!"

He hung up the receiver and spoke for the others to hear. "They've found Armstrong's body. And he was proper knifed in a dozen places." Returning toward Corlick he rasped: "Some grudge, feller, I'll say!"

The prisoner did not wait for the grim guard who had been so fiercely dominating cramped muscles, fettering a tongue—that ached under the urge of speech—a tongue that might win some sort of half pardon for a wretch who was driven to the extreme of agonized fear.

Leaping away from Warner, the man ran across the room to where the judge and the attorney were sitting. "For God's sake, give me some hope as how I ain't going to the chair for this! He made me fight him, I tell you! Else he'd 'a' killed me. I ain't a-going to the chair for it, am I? Say I ain't!"

The judge did not reply; it was an inopportune time for any judicial opinion.

The impulsive Brickett was unable to hold back his sentiments. "What the blazes do you expect—going before the

court on the charge of another killing, less than a month after going free by a jury fluke? Corlick, this time you'll be nailed!"

The boss was reaching hairy, clutching hands for this wild man who might mean mischief—more of it!

Corlick ducked under the hands, dove under a table, and appeared on the other side; he grabbed the table and slid it about the floor, making it a barricade against the cursing Warner.

Judge Whitman reproved the precipitous prosecutor. "You're too hasty in speech, Brickett. He had already developed lunacy, and now you have prodded it!"

Warner, stronger than the other, dragged away the table.

Corlick fled to another barricade of the same sort in a corner of the spacious room; on his way he wrested the canvas belt from under his shirt. They had taken his knife, but they had not disturbed the money surrendered to him by the adjudicator on Judgment Knob.

With all his might Corlick hurled the belt into the face of the advancing boss. It served for a few moments, as a sop of raw meat might halt a pursuing wolf. Warner stopped and picked up the missile that had stung his eyes.

He made sure of it because Corlick was shouting: "It's the money he stole from your crew. You know well enough he stole. You as much as said so. He did steal it. He told me. He shoved the damnation stuff onto me! It has stung me like a snake bite! It has damned me. He was a dirty thief. You all know it! He threatened to get me—get me with hell fire! You all heard him. He was a damnation thief, all round! He even stole my own name—that's the kind he was! My name ain't Corlick. My name ain't Barter. My name is Jack Armstrong. Give me my chance, and I can prove it. For one thing, I've got my initials tattooed on my arm. I was a fool when I had it done, but they're *there!*" He stripped up his shirt sleeve. "Give me my chance, I say, and I can prove I'm Jack Armstrong, and I never had no chance in this world because I was throwed out as a kid."

Brickett had been listening with keen attention; he remarked sarcastically: "If that's all he can think of in the way of defense—his own right name—he's in a bad way, judge!"

"Probably the poor devil has only that straw to grab at, and it's a rather sad confession of helplessness—only a name already discredited by another rogue," returned the judge, displaying grudging pity for a moment. "But a stop must be put to his folly. It's raking my nerves!"

WARNER had perceived that this man was safely penned in the corner. He took his time in doubling the belt and stuffing it into his trousers pocket. He did not hurry about laying hands again on the prisoner; the latter was spouting interesting inside stuff!

Judge Whitman, however, was considering the legal aspects of the affair, protecting the rights of an accused man. The judge wanted to listen to no confessions, even if the wild ravings of a man apparently demented could be construed as actual evidence, worth anything in the law.

"Warner, take that fellow, whatever his name may be, and lock him up somewhere. Put him by himself where he can calm down. This bellowing is distressing."

"I have a safe and solid back room in my office camp, sir. I'll take the responsibility for him."

Warner yanked away the table and began to drag the prisoner, who was squalling shrilly, toward the door.

"I tell you, I *will* talk it out to you, honorable judge. You won't be giving me no chance in court, no chance like I have here. Lawyers won't give me no chance—I know! I've been in court, and they didn't let me talk it out like man ought to talk to a man. I've never had no chance in all my life—nohow—no way. I was throwed into the streets to make my own way. My mother neglected me. My father was no good."

Warner had his man across the room to the door, but was unable to open it, needing both hands to control the squirming captive. "Shut your clapper, you

damnation pup! Talking dirt about a father and a mother!"

"You'd talk against your own father if he had done the *same* to *you*! Set himself up to be a tin god on wheels. Thought he had all the know about the right and the wrong o' things! Made himself the high dictator to tell everybody what to do, and used a club to make 'em! Damn my father!"

Warner, both horrified and enraged, slammed the fellow against the wall, half stunning him. The boss used the opportunity to fling open the door. Then he twisted both hands into the slack of the mackinaw jacket and backed away into the gloom, dragging the frenzied wretch who screamed appeals to the judge to give him a chance.

"Awful, Brickett! Awful!" muttered the justice. "First, that grin of his in the courtroom. Now those yells. That young whelp seems to be laying himself out to wreck my nervous system!"

"Exactly! And you're not the only sufferer, judge!" The observant Brickett had been glancing at the recluse of the Knob and now called the justice's attention to that person. The man was hitching toward them with the painfully uncertain gait of a victim of locomotor ataxia.

As soon as he observed that the men of the law were staring at him, he spoke in a stuffy voice, his tongue unwieldy. "Shall I be called on to go to court—to give evidence—to—to— What must I do?"

"Of course you'll be obliged to go to court," bluntly replied the district attorney. "You're the chief witness—the whole works in pinning murder onto this fellow—Jack Armstrong. We must call him that, I suppose, now he insists on it as his true name. Confound it, man, you haven't any doubt about your duty and your responsibility as the main witness, have you!"

"I must not go. I shall not testify against him." His voice was low, muffled; there was dogged obduracy in his demeanor.

"Then, by Judas, I'll have you arrested and held in jail till the trial comes off!"

The man whom the attorney threat-

ened began to drag himself with stiff legs nearer to Judge Whitman.

"For *me* to go to court! You know about my own case!" It was anxious pleading, not mere statement. "To give my own name in that court of law! To stir up the memory of a dreadful thing! To testify! To swear murder onto a man! Then they would ask—would make me tell what I myself had done! You have been harsh with me, sir, but won't you pity me now?"

The justice's shaggy eyebrows were knotted, but there was no severity in his tones when he answered: "I realize fully. I'll be kind enough at this time to keep my tongue off any taunts about the retribution involved in revenge. But it's bad business—I told you so yesterday—and we'll let it go at that. However, you must give your word of honor that you'll be present in court to testify. That testimony will be the only conclusive evidence. It will convict the accused. If you will not promise to be on hand, steps must be taken to hold you in restraint until the trial comes off."

THE manner of the recluse changed then. He broke out of his torpor. Once more he was showing evidences of the recurrent mania which lurked below his customary composure. "But there is hell in the core of this thing!" he shrieked. "Damn you, you law men, are you going to drag it all out of me? Are you——"

The justice barked out with his pedagogic, courtroom peremptoriness:

"That's enough! Stop there! I've been listening to too much lunacy to-night. Perhaps I'll allow you to talk to me in the daylight, if you're calmer. But not now—not *now*, I say!"

He flung up his hands in impatient gesture of absolute refusal to listen and stamped out of the room, Brickett following slowly and turning his head to expostulate with the clamorous man who was at their heels.

In the doorway the attorney halted, barring the portal with his arm. "Confound it, man, I don't want to lock you up. Be sensible, now, and stop your ranting. Give me your word that you'll

be on and at the trial. That killer must be convicted!"

The recluse was struggling against the barring arm; he plucked limply at Brickett's fingers that were set on the jamb. "I must speak to the judge."

Justice Whitman, dimly revealed in the wan light, was pacing to and fro outside the door, his head bowed in thought, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Frankly, I think his honor has had about enough of your gabble, Mister Hermit. Down to cases, now! Can you get Warner here to give bond along with you, to make sure of you as a witness? Then you can stay in your home, and he can keep a sharp eye on you."

All at once the judge broke out of his slow pacing and hurried to the door. He pushed both men inside and closed the portal and stood straight with his back against it.

"We'll now stop playing with riddles," he announced with blunt decision. "This time, Brickett, I'll have you in on what is said between this man and myself. On your mountain, Sir Hermit, you spoke rather slightly of my memory for names. Well, a little pondering, the association of ideas, and a name spoken quite frequently in these parts of late—all these items have produced results, sir. You are John Warren Armstrong. I have a fairly lively memory, you see, when it has been properly poked. I'm not betraying you, sir. Your case is on the court records." The other had protested with a flash of savageness. "But Mr. Brickett must be informed for his guidance as a public prosecutor."

The justice addressed the attorney. "You may not remember clearly the Armstrong case. It was tried in my court some twenty years ago, before you were admitted to the bar. One of the first of the unwritten-law, brain-storm imbroglios!" Then he added sarcastically, out of his jurist's contempt for evasions of the letter of the law: "Defense along that line has served many a short-cut killer in late years, Brickett—taking the law into his own hands."

The recluse retorted with passion: "If I had not killed, I would have brought only shame into this wilderness—the

shame that drove me out from under the eyes of men—away from my career.”

“Having killed, what did you bring here in addition to the shame?” demanded Judge Whitman.

“Satisfaction!” Armstrong walked away.

AFTER vivid interest in the appraisal of the man whose identity was revealed, the attorney turned to the justice and nodded. “I know the case, of course. Studied the reports. A college professor killed a cur. Well, judge, if I had been on that jury I’d have voted for acquittal, I guess.”

“That’s heresy in law and decidedly unprofessional,” the judge declared sharply. He swung away from Brickett, walked across the room, and confronted Armstrong. The attorney’s unethical declaration had irritated the justice; he continued to be caustic in dealing with this other man. “Sir, you seem to have met up at last with the son you cast out—a by-product of that revenge system of yours. The name and your manner reveal your conviction that he’s your son. How do you like your work?”

“It’s none of my doing—what he has become!” There was fire in the reply. The judge’s steel had struck flint.

“This is a poor time for any argument as to what he might have become if you had done a father’s duty by him. And it’s equally unprofitable to remind you of what I warned, yesterday, on your mount of judgment! You must have some sort of feelings under that shell of yours. I’m charitable enough to believe so. At any rate, I’ll not taunt with any ‘I-told-you-so’s!’ But it is my duty to warn you that you must go to court and tell what you saw—you must hold to the story you told when you accused that man in the presence of many listeners. If that is the hell you referred to a little while ago, you must make the best of it. You heated that hell!”

“You cannot force a father to swear away the life of his son.”

“I’ll admit that the law has provided certain reservations in regard to the testimony offered by blood kin or wives. But peculiar cases call for exceptional treat-

ment. Justice must be served. That has been your own lofty declaration till now. I trust you to practice what you have preached.” The judge hastened on, putting up his hand to check the other. “You must be in court, I say. We can make sure of you by locking you up. That will be unfortunate, on top of all the rest. If you can make us certain of your presence by a better plan, I’ll be glad to consider it.”

Armstrong controlled himself; his features became rigidly calm; he was in the coils of a situation that would utterly crush him if he invited further constriction by violence of his own.

“Your honor, will you allow me a few minutes to take thought?”

“Willingly, sir!” The judge went back to Brickett.

“Honestly, I think we’ll have to turn the key on him,” confided the attorney.

“Remember, Brickett, we’re dealing with an educated man—a gentleman, in spite of his vagaries. And on account of those vagaries, even the matter of principle is a controlling influence. In his estimation, as we have seen his attitude, justice is a holy thing. I think I know already what he will propose; I intend to meet him halfway. I pity him!” He caught a glint in Brickett’s eyes. “That’s all right. Even though he flouts the letter of the law, and I’m harsh, I pity him.”

Armstrong came to them shortly. “In some matters you have good reason to distrust my weakness, Judge Whitman. You undoubtedly consider it weakness?”

“I have nothing to add to certain opinions already stated, sir!”

“But my word of honor is neither feeble nor faltering, Judge Whitman. Will you admit the strength of that bond, if I tender it as security?”

As he replied, the justice swept Brickett’s face with a glance which betrayed the triumph of a prophet who had hit the nail on the head. “Professor Armstrong, I will accept such a bond.”

“Thank you. It binds me to return to this place as soon as my feet can bring me, after I have visited my camp on the knob.” He cast a side glance on Brickett. “I need to procure a few neces-

sary things, if I am to go away to a place where the law can keep me under observation."

At that moment Judge Whitman was impelled to proceed more than half the way to which he had pledged himself, when talking to the attorney. More intense sympathy surged in him suddenly. "If I have been judging you too harshly or——"

With the effect of one slashing a thread with a knife, so did Armstrong cut in with sharp speech. "I recognize only one Judge in my affairs—God Almighty—Himself!"

He flung open the door and disappeared.

Brickett opened his mouth, but he promptly clamped his jaws when he looked at the judge's face. It was sufficiently plain that the embers of his honor's temper needed no poking at that moment.

Muttering, Judge Whitman marched out of the camp. He halted outside, and Brickett joined him. There was reason for the sluggish progress of the dawn. A solid, slaty roof of cloud was overhead. When the two men gazed up at the sky, sifting snowflakes touched their faces with points of chill.

"Yesterday was altogether too warm and bright for this time of year," said the attorney. "It was a weather breeder, just as I figured."

The judge started away toward their private camp. "Yes, I noticed how clear the air was yesterday. I could see so far and so distinctly from the peak. Sure sign of a storm!"

"Somebody else saw very distinctly, too. And it was a sure sign of a storm, all right," returned Brickett.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

AFTER breakfast, Boss Warner knocked in humble politeness on the door of the private camp and obeyed the judge's curt command, "Come in!"

Warner had a key in his hand. "I've got to be out on the job, gents! Would it be asking too much if I call on you to take charge of this key? It's to the

back room where I've locked up the killer."

Brickett rose and took the key; immediately he handed it to Judge Whitman.

"We'll be responsible for the prisoner," stated the justice.

"I've phoned for the sheriff and the medical examiner, sir. They may have to come slow, for this is setting in to be a bad storm."

He displayed embarrassment of which they took small notice; his manner was natural after his earlier disrespect in the case of men of importance. He went to the door and turned, his hand on the latch. "Will you excuse me if I say a word about something that's on my mind?"

The judge nodded.

"I had to listen to that poor devil's talk after I locked him in. No doubt he has been a bad one, gents. But in this last case he simply *had* to fight back to save his life. Perhaps we excuse such things too much, we chaps up here in the woods, where the man-to-man stuff has to be settled suddenly, because courts ain't handy. But we all heard that other fellow threaten to get his man. He had a gun, too. And if it wasn't in self-defense, with the odds all on one side, then what was it?"

"You don't expect a trial of the case, here and now, or an opinion from the court, do you?" Brickett demanded with some heat.

"No, sir!" returned Warner, still humble. "I was only smoothing the way to telling you that the boys and myself have had a change of heart, as you might say, since we have talked the thing over. The poor cuss that's locked up has had a dirty deal handed to him in this camp by that fellow who has been killed, whatever his name is. We don't go back of what has happened under our noses. And I'm telling you, right out square, I ain't to be trusted with that key, and if that poor, scared youngster goes to the chair for putting a p'isenous renegade out of the way—saving his own life at the same time—then the law ain't what it ought to be. Good day, gents!" He bolted out and slammed the door.

There was a long silence between the two men who sat in the camp.

Judge Whitman spoke first. "Brickett, I'm afraid I'm getting a little wild myself, after my two weeks in the wilderness. I don't applaud Warner, of course. He kicked legal technicalities too savagely. But I've caught myself several times falling into a foolish mood where I—well, I—— Let's see how I'll put it. Say, for instance, a mood in which I might look leniently upon certain *adjustments* of technicalities to fit exceptional cases." He shook himself irritably. He went to the window and stared out into the snow, swirling in wind-whipped clouds. "If it weren't for this confounded storm, I'd be hurrying back to an atmosphere of safeness and sanity!"

The second and succeeding long silence was broken by the attorney. "Yes, this storm is bad for *us*, but it does give the chief witness a devil of a good excuse for not showing up again."

"The man will come back, Brickett," snapped the judge over his shoulder. "And I'm more than ever uneasy about my state of mind. Confound it! I'm wishing he'd keep away—*stay away!*"

CHAPTER XII.

THE KEY.

BUT Armstrong returned much sooner than they who awaited him had expected. Judge Whitman had gone often to the window, in his uneasy pacing of the room. A figure came breasting out of the white smother.

"Hell!" blurted his honor with unjudicial vehemence. "That fool is back here again!"

Brickett turned away and poked the wood fire. He grinned unobserved, fully understanding the judge's state of mind.

Armstrong entered, after receiving permission by the lawyer's call in replying to the knock. Standing just inside the door, the new arrival smote his palms upon his breast to dislodge the clinging snow. "I'm here, gentlemen!" he announced quietly.

"Yes, I see," snarled the judge, unappeased. "A man of your age shouldn't run risks by such exertions."

"I am used to the outdoors and all its hardships, sir. I promised I'd come back at once. My word is sacred!"

The judge walked to and fro some minutes, pondering. Then he dredged from his pocket the key intrusted to him by Warner. "Armstrong, do you want to go to your son—tell him who you are—have a talk with him?"

"I suppose I must face the situation. It will not be pleasant," replied the father, showing no emotion. "But I have resigned myself to do my duty as you have pointed it out to me, sir. This, of course, is a part of that duty."

"It certainly is," stated the justice. He surrendered the key into the hand which the father drew from his mitten. "Warner has gone to his work. You two will be alone in the camp."

Armstrong departed precipitately. Brickett, sauntering to the window, noted how quickly the man's figure disappeared in the snow clouds.

The attorney was impelled to view the situation solely from the zealous prosecutor's standpoint. He was nettled by Judge Whitman's leniency in giving a criminal and a chief witness so much rope at a critical juncture. Mighty slack methods, so Brickett opined. His face revealed his sentiments when he turned from the window.

"Think I'm too soft, eh?" queried the judge irritably.

"Your honor, I'd hardly dare express what——"

"Good Jericho! I've had to keep reminding you that court isn't in session up here. We're on a hunting trip, and you run no risks of being fined for contempt if you unload your mind once in a while."

"All right!" blurted Brickett, grabbing this chance to vent his displeasure. "I'll say the devil himself couldn't pick a better day to serve the uses of a couple of pals of his."

"What's *that*? Suggesting that I'm the devil's understudy in this instance? Brickett, I have a good mind to fine you fifty dollars, court or no court, and collect with that iron poker!" It was bluster with a glint of banter in it.

"Just the same, judge, it's a terrible temptation for poor devils in their kind

of a scrape! It's testing old Armstrong to the limit."

"Perhaps that's why I gave him the key. I want to see how he comes through."

"He kept his word to come back here from his camp, I'll admit. But he didn't give us any new pledge about not running away with that son."

"The pledge is implied. He's a ramrod on the point of honor. You should be able to see that for yourself. He would have lowered himself by babbling any more promises. Oh, *he* won't run away," stated the judge loftily.

CHAPTER XIII.

HEADED NORTH.

TWO men, penned within four walls of logs, sat in a silence which had been prolonged until it had become torture. John Warren Armstrong had been as precipitate in speech, when he burst into the room, as he had been headlong in driving across the clearing through the whirling snow. He had declared his relationship curtly, standing just inside the door.

The young man leaped to his feet, but he immediately sat back upon the edge of the bunk. In the older man's declaration and in his demeanor there had been no hint of gentleness, forgiveness, or paternal affection. The man whom he had claimed as a son did not venture even to put out his hand; there had been no inviting proffer of the father's hand.

The elder Armstrong's arms were folded across his breast. He had not troubled himself to brush off the clinging snow. The gelid sheathing seemed a natural garment for that figure of icy reserve. After one flash of emotion, the other man felt no impulse of affection. He would as soon have thought of seeking the embrace of a snow image.

The silence of mutual constraint dragged on, and on.

The younger man spoke first. The elder had accustomed himself to the prolonged muteness which is a part of the association of man with man in the forest. A wry, deprecating smile prefaced the remark: "This ain't much like what they write in storybooks about what hap-

pens when a father finds his long-lost son."

"I know nothing about the lies they write in storybooks. But I do know about the psychology of human emotions. It was my work to instruct about such matters in college."

"Guess I never did know what kind of teaching you did. I was too young. But I don't get you, in what you're saying."

"I hardly expected *you* to understand."

There was another prolonged hush in the room; the young man plucked at his blanket, revealing his nervous tension, his embarrassment.

"I'll say something on the subject, however." The father thawed sufficiently out of his rigidity to seat himself on a stool. "Affection, even of parents and children, can be cultivated—made into something real and earnest—only by long association. If there has been prolonged separation the parties meet naturally as strangers, to a considerable extent.

"There must be a new knitting of ties. That is often very difficult when habits and associations have carried the parties to opposite extremes of mental and moral attitudes and——"

"Oh, my Lord!" wailed the younger man. "Don't reel me out a lot of long-winded lingo. I don't get you, I say. I ain't been to school. I don't know nothing much. I never had a chance. I'm only a cheap mutt. But I ain't blaming *you*! Maybe it was in me and had to come out."

The elder's face twisted with a queer grimace, as if he had received a thrust, quick and painful.

The other hurried on, not looking at the father: "Probably you couldn't have done anything sensible with me, anyway. So I ain't blaming you. But, of course, I could say——"

The father broke in, in his turn: "You said enough for any understanding when you damned your father in my hearing. Don't try to add anything to that."

"All right! I'll shut up. I don't know what to say to you, anyway." It was piteous abasement in conscious guilt. "Only this! I can remember, way back,

when I was a kid, and I didn't know what to say to you then, when you pitched into me. It never seemed to do me much good when you beat me up for lies. You're high and mighty about truth-telling and all them things. So now I suppose you'll have to testify in court and send me to the chair."

"Almighty God, will you keep that mouth closed?" The father leaped up and kicked the stool into a corner. He stamped to and fro. "You have cut me open with that tongue. Don't pour vitriol into the gash!"

After a time the father recovered his poise to some extent; if he felt any anguish of remorse he was able to hide it behind his customary mask of stoicism. "I came to you for a definite purpose. I realize the limits of my endurance. I did not intend to be with you as long as I have. It is wasting time on matters that cannot be helped now. So, to business!"

HE began to unbutton his coat. While his hands were busy, he talked on. "They allowed me to go to my camp this morning. I had a plan in my mind even then. I figured on some such opportunity as this. I believed that Judge Whitman, at any rate, would allow me to have a talk with my son." He dragged a large wallet from his breast pocket. "I brought this from my camp. In it is all that's left of the money I brought into the woods—my savings." He tossed the wallet onto the bunk beside the young man. "Take it and go! This storm will hide your escape—cover your tracks."

"Go where?" quavered the son. "I'm all in, after what you done last night to me!" He immediately realized how much that sounded like a taunt, and he whined an appeal for pardon.

The father disregarded both the taunt and the appeal. "You must have strength enough to make a fight for your life. Go north along the same long trail on which you started. I have planted snowshoes behind the first big spruce at the mouth of the trail—at the edge of the clearing. Be on your way! Warner will be back at noon. Pick up that money! Hurry! Get out of here!"

The son pointed his finger at the wal-

let; he did not stretch forth his hand to take it. "What have you got left to live on?"

"I don't need money. You *do*. On your way, I say!"

The other shook his head stubbornly. "I'm cheap and low. I've owned up to it! But I won't take your money. You're old, and you need it."

"I have made plans for myself. I'll not need it."

The young fellow had a sharp ear for significant tones and a keen eye for any revealing manner in men; he had needed and had cultivated such qualities of discernment in his desperate affairs. To be sure, the urgency of the situation would account for much of the frenzied determination displayed by the elder. But the son sensed something deep and bodeful in the declaration regarding the money.

"*Why* won't you need it?" he demanded suddenly.

The blunt question tripped something in a mind which the discriminating Brickett had sized up as unstable in stress. "What right have you to ask about my needs or my plans? I might tell you that the birds will bring me bread. I might explain that there is a steep, sheer cliff on the east side of my mountain. And yonder there's a deep lake and a lofty bridge. It might be a rare experience, as the last one in a man's life, to plunge down in this white cloud of storm—racing the snowflakes to the water! But as to why I won't need that money, that's none of your infernal business. I tell you, every minute is precious. Else you'll be trying your own experience of death—waiting for the click of a switch—wondering how lightning feels when it tears through a man's vitals. Aren't you frightened? God help me to scare you! Take that money and run—run for your life!"

The other picked up the wallet, leaped to his feet, and flung the money into a corner of the room. He shouted: "I may be scared! I am! But I'll be damned if you shall size me up as the cheapest mucker in the world. I won't take your money! No, not a cent of it. Did you hand it to me, all friendly and

helpful? No, you didn't. You heaved it at me."

The father was fighting off any spirit of leniency or pardon. He had settled upon a policy of implacable severity. "Once more, I say, 'Go!' That's my command—my last to you in this life."

"I won't go! What could I do all alone in the woods, in this awful storm? I'll stay and take my medicine. Everything has broke wrong for me. What's the use?" He sat back on the edge of the bunk.

IN the cramped space of those penning walls the two men went on to fight out the dreadful battle of this strange human tragedy. The son had settled into dogged obstinacy, mute and motionless, staring down at the floor, paying no heed to his father's commands.

Desperately, the elder attacked from another angle. "Giving you that money is no sacrifice." He picked up the key from the table where he had laid it. "But when I received this key from the hands of Judge Zenas Whitman, I took with it his trust in me as a man of honor. For your sake, and for the first time in my life, I am putting away the one decent thing I have held sacred—my bounden word. By the Almighty God, your numbered soul must take account of that kind of sacrifice!"

"Probably that's what's the matter with me, right now. I *am* taking account. And I won't run away. I'll match you in a little sacrificing of my own. I'm going into court and plead guilty and take what's coming to me!"

"They won't allow you to plead guilty. I know the ways of the law. The prosecutor will be afraid of a manslaughter sentence—only that—if you throw yourself on the mercy of the court. They mean to try your case—bring up your past record—force testimony from me—send you to the chair. And all my own shame, as the killer of a man, will be dragged out and shown again to the world. Before that happens—I give my oath here and now to God—I'll kill myself!"

The son, not looking up, having the demeanor of one who feared to trust him-

self in an exchange of stares, fingered the blanket and muttered. At last he admitted: "It's tough, all round!"

This whining, banal statement, in that agonizing crisis, stirred afresh the other's ferocity, gave him a new grip on the attitude he had assumed as the best method of prevailing in this affair. "Damn you! I had nothing to live for, as matters stood. I don't expect any gratitude from you. I'm not asking for any. But by saving your life, as I've offered you the chance, you can keep me from suicide."

The young man arose. Sudden resolution animated him. In growing frenzy the other was declaiming his intention, over and over, to go out into the storm and seek death.

"Just a minute! Please! Please!"

The father ceased his frantic pacing and swung to face the one who was appealing.

"I've got something mighty important to say to you," declared the young man. "I'm going to give you a reason why you've *got* to stay alive—if you want to do the square thing—and I've heard you talk a whole lot about justice. I ain't your son. That kills the whole trouble for you, don't it? I ain't your son, I tell you! And I'm damnation glad I ain't, as things stand!" He stripped up his sleeve. He showed the tattooed initials. "Them stand for my real name—it's Jim Adams!"

The elder man walked slowly backward and sagged against the log wall. "Why, in the name o' hell, did you claim to be John Armstrong?"

"I was afraid they'd look up my back record under the name of Jim Adams. I'll hand over the whole works to 'em now. Even if they didn't have me nailed as Bart Corlick, the Jim Adams record will do the whole business for me. And that's that!"

He broke in roughly on the gasping incoherencies of the other man. "Why take that name? Say, why not pick out a good name, while I was about it? Name of a fellow I knew once—a name without any smirch on it. It can't hurt *him*. He's up in Canada somewhere. He's all right—making good. I've got word about him. And he's your son, all

sure enough. I knew the story about him, and what his father done. So it's straight—what I'm telling you. There, now! You've got something to stay alive for, ain't you?"

"But how did you happen to know him?" clamored the father. "Was he down in your—was he—did he——"

"He was as clean as a whistle—all through, I tell you!" The young man gulped. "Why, he was a social-service worker—he got close to fellers like me and tried to have 'em go straight. That's him, all right. And you ought to be proud of him. Go hunt him up. And you'll want to keep on living."

"A son like that would never forgive me," lamented the father.

The newly declared Adams swung out his flattened hand with a tough's gesture of dismissing foolish argument. "Look here! That's what he preached to us—forgiveness. No matter what anybody had done—forgiveness. He'll put his arms round you. I didn't do it a little while back because I ain't your real son. See? But don't you worry about *him*! You've got a lot o' good stuff coming to you, mister. Hunt him up!"

The hermit stared.

"Where? Where?"

"I know where that feller lives in Canada—the one what let me know about your son being up there and doing so well. I'll tell you what, mister. I'll make a dicker with *you*!" The eyes narrowed with a crafty expression. "I never could get through those woods by myself. I don't know much of anything about the woods. I'm afraid of 'em. If you go north with me you'll be headin' toward your son. And I'll be taking my chance of getting away from the chair. What say? Will you trade?"

"I will!" declared Armstrong. "And my duty to the law is only a small thing compared with what *you* are giving *me*!" Now the frenzy of haste took possession of him. He picked up the wallet, ran out of the room, circled inside Warner's office and peered into the smother of snow from the windows, as he came to each. "Come! Hurry!" he called to the young man. "Every minute counts!" He flung open the outer door and pointed

his finger. "Run—that way! Dive into it! Wait for me at the mouth of the trail!"

THE fugitive leaped into the storm, and his figure was immediately blotted and merged with the white blankness.

Armstrong locked the inner door and went forth. As best he was able, he composed his emotions and his features while he struggled through the heaping snow, on his way to the camp occupied by the men of the law.

When he entered, obeying a summons, he had put on the mask of serenity which they had first seen on his features when they came in view of him on Judgment Knob.

The two men stared at him, then they exchanged astonished glances with each other. This calm man, with the unmistakable light of joy in his eyes, was an apparition calculated to amaze those who had been apprehensively canvassing the situation. They had been dreading his return, knowing from what a torture chamber he would emerge.

"Gentlemen, there's a good reason for my new peace of mind. All our difficulties, in regard to the trial in court—your anxieties and my own—have been cleared up."

"Good thunder! No wonder you're looking like a cat fresh from the cream jar," snapped Brickett. "What has happened?"

"The man on whom this was turned"—he displayed the key in his palm—"has confessed to me that his real name is James Adams."

"Why did he say he was John Armstrong?"

"It was at the time of his mad fright. He was grasping at straws to save himself. He says he has a criminal record under the name of James Adams."

The judge inquired of the prosecutor by a side glance.

Brickett shook his head. "I don't place the fellow, your honor. But there are a good many counties in this State, and I can't follow all the cases."

The justice eyed Armstrong with lively interest. "Was it only by chance, sir, that he took your son's name?"

"No, sir! My son was a social worker among the unfortunate. Adams knew my son. And the rogue took a good name, so he says, in order to hide his own trail of crime. An insane impulse, of course, but Adams was highly wrought at the time, you'll remember." He crossed the room and laid the key in the jurist's hand.

"Sit down!" It was mingled invitation and command, as the judge voiced it. The other hesitated.

"I'd rather not intrude any longer, if it pleases you, sir. I have much to ponder on, just now. If you'll permit, I'll go to the main camp and sit by myself."

"I understand your feelings. Go along!"

Brickett turned from the window after he had seen Armstrong plod, head down, across the small area of vision, disappearing behind a snow squall. "Judge, I reckon I ought to go over and have a session with this Adams chap!"

But Judge Whitman rammed the key down into his trousers pocket. "Keep in here out of the storm, Brother Brickett. Furthermore, it would be rather unethical, taking advantage of that fellow now, when his feelings are so disturbed. He must have been having a terrible session of his own, with a human corkscrew—considering how Armstrong has pulled out the truth!"

"Perhaps it was a case of pity for a father," suggested the attorney. He was ironical rather than sympathetic, and the judge caught the innuendo.

"Maybe so! I'm pretty full of pity, as you have noticed, and some of it may have slopped over and affected a renegade. Or else it was Warner who slopped some of *his* pity. He has been in closer contact with the fellow than I have."

Brickett opened his mouth, but the judge shut him off short. "That key stays right here in my pocket." He slapped his thigh. "I'm taking the full responsibility, I tell you again. Get that cribbage board out of my bag. Fill your pipe and enjoy serenity—some of that, too, must have slopped onto you from John Warren Armstrong, as it did on *me*! My nerves are much soothed. And for you—at any rate, you don't need to

fight any longer with a hostile witness. Take it easy, Brickett—take it easy!"

They sat down to their cards.

The guide joined the fugitive at the edge of the clearing.

Armstrong dislodged two pairs of snowshoes from the snow at the foot of a big spruce.

"I brought a pair for myself," he stated curtly. "I was prepared to go on foot somewhere—away from these camps!"

Remembering what the father had threatened to do, the young man did not find the statement enigmatic. He made no answer. He reached to lift the knapsack which had been left with the snowshoes. But the other man seized it and lifted it to his shoulders.

"I filled it with food to serve you on your way. Now I will carry it!"

Armstrong irritably checked the young man's expostulations. "You're a greenhorn in the winter woods. You'll have all you can do if you manage yourself on those snowshoes. Step high and drag one over the other. Follow me. Watch how I do it."

They headed toward the north and trudged up the trail.

The sifting, seething snow filled and smoothed off the tracks they left behind them.

CHAPTER XIV.

"GOLD-BADGE" GUS.

WARNER came in with his men in the late afternoon, wallowing around the arm of the lake through drifted snow. The storm had ceased; at sunset a narrow band of crimson across the clouds in the western sky promised settled weather.

Warner had worked his men until the snow stopped falling. He did not allow them to waste time in the toilsome journey to the camps for the noonday meal. The bull cooks, making nimbler work of it on snowshoes, dragged food to the bridgehead on moose sleds.

That storm had taken Warner by surprise. He was depending on a longer period of settled weather; he had been lulled by the bland promises of the late autumn. Therefore, all through the blinding storm, he worked his men to the

limit of their endurance, clearing the cuts leading to the bridge approaches, making sure that operations would not be blocked.

The boss was tired, and his nerves were taut. His wearied men were as distinctly unamiable. It was not a favorable time for any provocation by matters outside the regular affairs of the camp.

Warner stamped directly into the main camp, avoiding his office. He was afraid of his mood just then. The situation of the prisoner had been in Warner's mind all day, to his discomfort. The fellow had no right to bang into a busy camp and mix up affairs and ideas, as he had. The boss' unstable sympathy was quite in a way to be tripped into exasperation. He might find himself cuffing the man, he reflected sourly, if any more laments should rasp emotions now filed to a wire edge.

Warner sat by himself and scowled and waited for the supper horn.

It was an inopportune moment for the steel to strike flint. But the steel came to hand very shortly in the persons of Sheriff Dobson and Medical Examiner Crockett. There had been urgency in Warner's call over the telephone. They had lost no time. But their horses had wallowed to a standstill in the drifts. Then a lumber camp had furnished two shifts of huskies, men who dragged moose sleds, on which the sheriff and the doctor rode, urging haste, afraid of being overtaken in the woods by the night.

Chilled and cramped and cross, Sheriff Dobson came limping into the main camp. He was tall, gaunt, pompous and brusque. He asked for Warner, marched over to the boss, and returned a scowl of his own when the other man rudely kept his chair.

"Where's the body?"

"Up in the woods."

"Has it been carefully guarded?"

"I called my men off after the snow started this morning. I had to use 'em on the job. They stuck up a stake 'side o' the remains."

"That's inexcusable negligence," declared the examiner.

"Well, I guess nobody's been around

there to steal that corpse," drawled Warner sarcastically.

The sheriff's concern shifted immediately to the criminal awaiting formal arrest. "Where's the killer?"

"Locked up in the back room of the office camp."

Dobson imperatively and offensively clacked a bony finger into his palm. "Hand me the key!"

Warner leaned back his chair and stuck his hands into his trouser pockets. But he made no move to withdraw the hands. "If you'll step over across to the camp that's marked 'Private' over the door, you'll find the gent I left the key with. If you're more polite to him than you've been to me, he may lend you that key."

"Confound you, you're impertinent!"

"Maybe! I'm *trying* to be, so as to keep up with *you*."

The sheriff started for the door. He halted and shouted to the boss: "You're the head of this camp, and you had no right to turn that key over to any irresponsible person!"

"I've been worrying all day about trusting a man like him," admitted the boss, with impish desire to start something. "You'd better hurry over and grab that key away from him before it's too late."

The sheriff did hurry, the doctor following at his heels.

In his choleric haste Dobson did not pause to knock on the door, but flung it open with a bang, stamped in and shouted, before he had accustomed his eyes to the dim light of a kerosene lamp: "Here, you, give me that key."

Judge Whitman lifted the lamp to investigate this impetuous identity and revealed his own face.

"Good hell!" barked the sheriff. Then, stricken, he pulled off his cap and apologized, gasping broken sentences. His panic was the greater because Justice Whitman always demanded decorum in court officials, insisting pertinaciously on the minutest details of procedure and respect for the bench.

"That will do, sir!" broke in his honor with severity. "Whom did you expect to find here—bursting in like that?"

His wits already in a whirl, the sheriff proceeded to make matters worse. "The boss just told me he had trusted the key of the prisoner's door to an irresponsible person."

"He intrusted the key to *me*, Mr. Sheriff. I have it. Here it is. Now, if you will retire with less uproar than you made when you entered, you will please me greatly."

Dobson backed out and joined Doctor Crockett, who had already made his escape.

"Holy crickets! What's the judge doing up here?" The doctor accompanied the query with a bewildered stare.

"Cussed if I know! And after that kind of an encounter, doc, I'm ready for any kind of a miracle."

BUT for the miracle suggested by that empty room, when he had unlocked the door and entered, Dobson was not prepared. His profanity revealed his state of mind. The place was designed to be a depository for articles or prisoners. The two windows were narrow slits in log walls. In ten seconds the sheriff satisfied himself that no prisoner was there. He rushed back to the private camp. This time he rapped and waited meekly until Brickett came and opened the door.

Dobson called out his news, not venturing within. "And there was only one way for him to get out, your honor—by that door!"

The judge was successfully hiding acute discomfiture behind a mask of severity. "Let's have at least one matter settled, as a start for further action. You don't think for a moment, do you, Mr. Sheriff, that I have had anything to do with this escape of a prisoner?"

"My Lord!" It was an explosion or protest.

"You seem to have your work laid out for you, Mr. Sheriff. I counsel quick action!"

Once more the sheriff joined the waiting medical examiner, and the two floundered away through the snow toward the main camp.

"Gad, Brickett! I had to get rid of him almighty sudden," confessed the

judge, "else I'd have convicted myself by guilty looks. Here's a devil of a mess!"

"It's all of that, plus nine, your honor." Then the attorney hesitated.

"Go ahead and say it, Brickett! The court is not in session. The court right now is feeling like a spanked boy."

"I was merely going to suggest that your approved ramrod on points of honor got warped almighty sudden."

"I took the responsibility. Now I'll take the blame. I had no right to tempt a father, as I did."

"But old two-legged Justice told us he found that the rascal *wasn't* his son!"

"It swung right around to the same thing in the way of a controlling motive. No doubt about it. Armstrong offered to let a son escape. In a flash of gratitude the fellow took a chance on sacrificing himself for the sake of easing a benefactor's agony about his boy. Then gratitude proceeded to hug gratitude. Understand? Gratitude is a mighty strong lever, Brickett, in a crisis, when feelings are overwrought."

"Well, gratitude for the loan of that key didn't seem to take much account of the situation in which you'd be left, sir!"

"Armstrong probably gave me the mental compliment of thinking I could look out for myself," suggested the jurist dryly. He shook himself. "Well, *I can!* Now that my thoughts are settling, I'm able to go to Dobson and tell him the facts. I'd rather admit promptly to being a fool than be shown up later as a liar!"

He shrugged on his overcoat and began to look for his cap.

Brickett opened the door and stood waiting. Suddenly the attorney cocked his ear.

"Say, your honor! A perfectly devilish hullabaloo has started over there in the main camp."

The judge found his cap and slapped it on. "We seem to have been missing considerable lately, including the escape of a prisoner. We'd better keep up to date on the rest of the happenings."

He followed Brickett across the clearing.

CHAPTER XV.

ENTER AN ACTOR.

THE first meeting of Sheriff Dobson with Boss Warner had been considerable of a collision. But the second encounter was threatening to be a general wreck.

The sheriff came on a rush into the main camp, where the boss and his men were waiting for the supper horn and were torpidly wondering, in their weariness, whether they had strength enough left to manage knives and forks.

"There has been some kind of trick or connivance in this camp," challenged Dobson fiercely, insultingly. "A murderer has been turned loose by somebody."

The boss lurched forward, champion on behalf of his crew. "We're all here. Come on, old Nick Carter. Pick your somebody!"

"Do you dare insult the sheriff of this county?"

"Same question about insults goes for you—about me and my men!"

"I'm holding this whole gang responsible until the guilty party has been produced. I shall act accordingly!" He threw open his overcoat and tapped his forefinger on the gold badge adorning the breast of the inner coat. "I here and now call all you men to your duty as a posse, exercising my power under the law. Get out and scatter through these woods and catch that murderer!"

They gave him a concerted howl of defiance and derision.

Dobson was too furious to remember clearly; as soon as he found a moment of silence, he yelled: "You tried to put me in dutch with his honor, Judge Whitman. And I told him you said you'd trusted the key to an irresponsible person."

"Damn you!" roared the boss. He lunged forward, flailing his arms, and the sheriff retreated.

"Mind your ways, Warner!" However, Dobson in that crisis was not guarding his tongue. "Judge Whitman has promised to give me a bench warrant, compelling you and your men to act as my posse."

"Just a moment!" called a new voice harshly. "Mr. Sheriff, your wits seem to be disordered."

The appearance of the judge in the room effectually stilled all the riot.

Brickett, at his honor's heels, declared: "Dobson, you have turned into a regular trouble shuttle. What's the matter with you?"

"I spoke a little too hastily, may it please your honor," apologized the sheriff, bowing to the jurist. "But these men are resisting my authority. I feel sure you'll hand down a bench warrant, as I have indicated."

"I don't share your certainty on that point," returned the judge acridly. "To be sure, I entered upon a riot, but I think it can be quelled without a *posse comitatus*. Your other lawful ground for calling on citizens, Mr. Sheriff, would be for aid in making an arrest."

"That's just my point, Judge Whitman. I want to arrest that murderer," said the sheriff.

"Point not sustained, sir! The county has no right to take men away from their work to aid you in any *detective* business. The criminal has escaped. It's up to you to locate him."

"Then that's where Gold-badge Gus quits," declared the unappeased Warner. "Detective—him? He couldn't detect a toothache in his own mouth."

The crew uproariously approved that opinion. They quieted under the judge's upraised palm.

"We are having a bit too much of quip and jest. Somebody may lose his temper," declared the judge.

For the most of them, asperity was smoothed by that irony, and they laughed. Warner stepped forward and faced the judge.

"I want to square myself about a few misunderstandings. You get me, don't you, Judge Whitman?"

His honor nodded amiably.

Warner was mightily encouraged by the judge's manner. In his new boldness the boss leaned over and whispered: "You're all *right*! Don't believe for a minute you're in wrong! Watch me do my stuff!"

Warner hurried to the door and turned

there to announce to all: "Stand by to see how a real detective turns his trick!"

At the door of the cookhouse, the boss stuck in his head and called forth a sallow youth, one of the bull cooks.

In the outer gloom Warner demanded: "You've been saying around camp, ain't you, as how you've been a actor?"

"I *have* been! But the jinx——"

"I ain't after no hard-luck story, son! No time to waste on it! I'm simply telling you you're going to do some good acting—damn sudden!" He grabbed the chap's arm and dragged him toward the main camp.

ON the way across the clearing the camp boss instructed the drafted actor in his new rôle. The prologue of the act was played in the darkness outside the door where the audience was waiting. There were off-stage squawks of protestation and squalls for mercy. Then Warner entered, hauling along a limp figure, as he might have dragged a sack of horse feed. He stood the bull cook up against the wall and cuffed him into semirigidity, so that he was able to stand when the boss stepped away.

"Now, you damnable sneak, you say it right out here, where all these others can hear you. You're the only one that's been redding up my camp, day after day. That's so, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir!" whimpered the bull cook.

"And you had full swing there to lay hands on what you thought you could use, hey?"

"Yes, sir!"

There had been no time to rehearse the act, and Warner was obliged to put all the words of the confession into his man's mouth. The instructions outside had been: "Only say, 'Yes, sir,' and act like a licked pup!" The actor was portraying guilty abasement in a manner that won Warner's secret admiration.

"And you grabbed onto the second and extry key to that inside door, thinking you could steal something valuable if it was stored in there some day, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when you was redding up the office this morning that killer got to your soft spot, when he howled and hollered

as how he had sluiced the thief that had been snitching cash from you and the other men in camp! Hey, ain't that so?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And at last you unlocked the door, so as to talk all sociable with him, and he knocked you down and scooted, did he?"

"Yes, sir!" It was a wail. The bull cook sagged and apprehensively shielded his face with his crossed arms.

Again Boss Warner mentally complimented this artistic acting.

"And then you threw the key out into the snow, hey?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, gents and everybody, that cleans up *that*!" announced the boss of the camp.

Brickett stepped forward, unable to restrain his lawyer's hankering to cross-examine.

But Warner was taking no chances on having a ticklish proposition tipped over. He roared a command for the door to be thrown open. He grabbed the bull cook by collar and slack of trousers and heaved him out, headfirst, into the big snowdrift that had been shoveled from the entrance to the camp. "Damn ye, root your way to ground and hunt for that key!"

Warner slammed the door shut.

The judge found an opportunity to rebuke Brickett's officiousness. "Confound you, keep your nose out of my alibi!" growled his honor, on his way past to restrain the rearing sheriff from action.

"Judge, I've got to arrest that dumb-bell for criminal negligence!" protested the sheriff.

"The prisoner was not formally in his custody, Mr. Sheriff. It stands merely as an unfortunate accident. There's only one arrest you're called on to make. Get the man who has run away. What is your plan?"

Dobson's face twisted with a grimace. The expression revealed sour reflections. At last he ventured: "Will you step to one side with me, Judge Whitman?"

The judge followed into a corner.

"As I'm understanding the case, your honor, there was more or less self-defense to the killing."

AT that moment their attention was taken by Warner. He was holding a big wad of money over his head in a wagging fist. "Here's good news, boys! I've been saving it till I had you bunched. Last night, Dan Barter, or whatever his name is, handed over to me, to give it to you, this money he took off that renegade he had to kill. Says to me, says he, 'Divvy it among the boys who lost it!' He's a square dealer, say I. How about three cheers!"

The sheriff wrinkled his forehead in distress, while the men howled. He went on as soon as the uproar quieted: "It's that kind of a case, Judge Whitman, where the county commissioners would kick like steers if I go to work and run up a big bill in chasing that killer. It's only a case of fly-by-nighters, up here, anyway. What's your advice?"

"I certainly cannot advise you to condone the escape of a slayer," declared the judge with lofty rectitude. But immediately he softened his demeanor and said graciously: "A wise man has suggested something about the impossibility of finding a needle in a load of hay. As I understand it, there are some millions of acres of forest surrounding us. I'm sure nobody ever expects even a sheriff to achieve the impossible."

"Oh, I shall do all I can, of course," declared the officer, greatly relieved by the jurist's concession as to difficulties. "I'll post a reward notice here in this camp—and hope for the best," he added cheerfully.

The hoarse hoot of the supper horn enabled the judge to break off a rather embarrassing conference.

The hungry men went piling tumultuously out of the camp. Warner lingered, and the jurist found a hint in this backwardness—this hesitation about grabbing victuals while they were hot. He sauntered over to the boss. "A very neat solving of a knotty problem, Mr. Warner. I congratulate you!"

"I was trying to square myself for that fresh talk I made to you, sir!"

"It was wholly due to my own folly about an incognito. We'll shake hands and forget the whole business."

Warner clung to the judge's hand.

There were no eavesdroppers. "Say, that young chap I lugged in here used to be an actor on the stage. Pretty good, *ain't* he?"

The judge blinked. "Are you meaning to tell me that he turned the criminal loose in order to inject some dramatic elements into the case?"

"I don't wholly get you, judge! But, no matter—'cause the fact is, there wasn't no extry key. The rab didn't unlock that door. However, I guess I know about how it might 'a' happened. It's only between you and me—and nothing's to be said! I'm only putting two and two together, and I hope the two I'm thinking of get away all safe to wherever they're headed for." The boss winked slowly, meaningly, confidentially—his first daring venture in that line with a judge of the supreme court. "And mum's the word!"

And then the judge gave Warner's hand an extra squeeze and winked.

Walking across the clearing on their way to supper, Judge Whitman remarked to Brickett: "In any case, we'll get out of these woods to-morrow, even if we have to wade on foot. Otherwise, I'll find myself taking a keen interest in compounding felonies. As it is, I'm wishing— But no matter! Brickett, don't ever mention this affair to me when we're outside. I want to forget a flaw in my judicial uprightness!"

CHAPTER XVI.

HIS ACCOMPLICE.

FROM an abandoned camp once used by poplar peelers, in the Rivière du Loup region, Armstrong and his companion stepped into the crisp glory of morning and gazed upon the dazzling stretches of untrodden snow. The young man brought fagots for a fire, dry twigs snapped from dead trees.

Armstrong brewed tea and made their breakfast. The two had struggled northward all the bleak day and half the night. Only desperation could have nerved men to cover such a distance, after the exhaustion of that preceding night, when an avenger had driven a malefactor into the hands of justice.

They had exchanged no speech during the toil of the march; they needed all their breath for their exertions. Coming to the camp, they had staggered in, and they fell upon the boughs of the bunks and passed into helpless lethargy.

Armstrong was the first to speak after they had come out into the sunshine. He was busying himself with the skillet; he did not look up at the young man. The latter had approached with an armful of fuel.

"You told me that you have heard something about the tragedy in my life."

"Yes, sir!" acknowledged the other, stammering. "I heard about it."

"I have a reason for bringing up the subject at this time. I have only a few words to say. That ledgy peak on which I lived—men have called it Judgment Knob! It is well named. I have looked many days, many nights up into the heavens, sitting on that peak, and I have been judged by Almighty God."

Not raising his eyes, Armstrong drew the end of a fagot across the snow, etching a bit of a line on a vast whiteness that was like a clean page freshly turned.

"For the sin of selfish pride—*guilty!*"

He continued to draw short lines, paralleling them.

"For scorning the rights of others—*guilty!*"

"For arrogating to myself all power and wisdom in forcing others how to live their lives—*guilty!*"

"For setting myself apart in my home, as one loftier and better—judging always harshly and not allowing myself to be judged—*guilty!*"

"For coldness and indifference—repelling affection—ridiculing the honest tenderness of love—denying to others what did not suit my selfish tastes—*guilty!*"

"For driving into despair and damnation a woman who would have stayed good and true, if I had given her my hand and had led her with love—I'm *guilty—guilty as hell!*"

He hurled the fagot far; he rose and faced the other. "I'm saying this to you, young man, because you, too, have been through the hell fires of revenge. You can understand. But most of all I'm saying it because I'm opening my soul of

repentance to you—to my son—John Armstrong!"

He stepped forward and laid his palms upon the shoulders of the cringing, stammering youth.

"When you lied to me, sonny, it was a holy lie! You were willing to sacrifice yourself to give me back peace of mind—to give me the reason for living. Only a son would do that. If I had doubts about you being my son, those doubts died at that moment."

Armstrong pressed his hands gently to his son's cheeks and kissed his forehead. "We're two of a kind, sonny, in dreadful trouble—in our repentance, in a last and desperate effort to be something else from now on."

He walked away hastily, scruffing his sleeve across his eyes. Looking down the trail along which they had come, he beheld the prints they had left—proofs of the staggering, toilsome plodding of men in their last extremity of endurance. Then he turned and gazed at the white, dazzling expanse of unmarked splendor stretching away toward the north. He found poignant symbolism in the contrast. Behind, along the trodden trail, were the evidences left by men who had struggled feebly and blindly, as best they were able, fighting adverse conditions, while the plodders had striven against odds. Ahead was an unbroken way—lighted by the new day, honestly clean. At any rate, it was a promise. And the sun and their new strength would enable them to walk straightly.

Later the two, father and son, trudged on toward the north. The son bore the burden of the knapsack; he had insisted on this service with a determination in which John Warren Armstrong found an earnest pledge of loyalty and devotion. There were no garrulous protestations of reform from the son. The father was glad of that. The boy's countenance told the story more convincingly.

They walked in silence after the father had stated a new creed of resignation. "If the law comes after us and takes us, Johnny, we'll be patient and do the best we can—together! I hope we can do a lot for ourselves, after this, if we struggle on together!"

ONE day Judge Whitman found an interesting letter in his mail on the table in his courthouse chambers. It was from the North Country, and in it John Warren Armstrong told the law where he and his son could be found. If the law demanded, they would come and surrender themselves.

The proffer really constituted a pathetic attempt to redeem a word of honor, broken in the agonizing stress of overwhelming temptation; the judge viewed the letter in that light. He gave it to Prosecutor Brickett to read, when the latter called during the course of the day.

"Huh!" grunted the attorney, finishing the letter. He squinted at the judge, trying to get a line on the other's state of mind; now that Justice Zenas Whitman was out of the wild woods, back on the job, toeing the crack of judicial and stern rectitude, it might be taking a hazardous chance, if any sort of leniency were suggested.

The judge lighted his cigar and peered at Brickett through placid wreaths of smoke. "They seem to have pretty good jobs up there! The old man is keeping the books in that timber camp and the

son is ax-whacking. Not much chance for mischief!"

There was more than a hint for Brickett in this casual remark. He began to fold the sheet of paper into a strip, as if unconscious of what he was doing. "It may be all right for *them*, judge, but for *me* it would be like serving a sentence behind bars."

"Quite right, sir! They're barred out of the world. Plenty of time for thinking, though! Good chance to revise thoroughly the revenge code!" His eyes wandered to the framed apothegm to which Francis Bacon's name was appended. He did not return his gaze to the prosecutor's face. "What action will you take on that letter?"

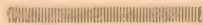
"This!" stated Brickett.

There followed a silence, and the justice was obliged to use his eyes in order to interpret the attorney's declaration.

Brickett had twisted the letter into a spill, had touched a match to the end, and was lighting his cigar from the bright blaze.

"Thank you, Jase!" said the justice with soulful emphasis. "It eases a fellow's state of mind to have an accomplice!"

"The Hound of the Barrys," by N. Meade and Captain A. P. Corcoran, is the feature story in the next issue of THE POPULAR. This unusually engaging tale is laid in Ireland, and the two writers are natives of the country. Soaked in the history and romance of the Emerald Isle, these authors have written a yarn which bristles with interest and drama.



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FORT SILL

THE historical army posts which lined the principal trails in the West, before the coming of the railroad, were almost invariably the outcome of the white man's need to arm himself against the Indian, who naturally resented the waning of his land and power. The establishment of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, grew out of a rather small circumstance.

A band of Indians had captured two white men and were holding them prisoners in the neighborhood of the present town of Fort Sill. Captain R. B. Macey, with an escort of soldiers, was sent to the aid of the men. One of the prisoners was a Mexican about forty years of age, who told Captain Macey that he wished to remain with the Indians. The other was a fifteen-year-old boy who had been kidnaped in Mexico. Macey informed the Indians that force would be used to capture the boy unless they released him willingly. The threat had the desired effect and the captain returned to headquarters. He declared the site of the Indian camp would make an excellent place for a fort, and a few years later the government built a post here which for many years was the only white stronghold in the region.



Lugubrious Luke

By Thomas Boyd

No matter how cheery the outlook, he'd find something wrong with it. That was why the fellows with him in the trench called him "Lugubrious Luke." And not even their final acclaim of him as a hero made him feel less gloomy.

OL' Luke! Ha—ha—ha! Makes me laugh fit to bust my insides—I swear it does!" Once more Rainey guffawed loudly, slapped his leg, leaned back hilariously, and wiped a mock tear from his eye.

Luke McDermott glared and went on gingerly wrapping his puttee, which had become loosened during his long journey through the woods. On his way up toward the front to rejoin his division, he had come a great distance. Starting from a hospital in the middle of France, he had made the trip of several hundred miles partly by truck, ambulance and narrow-gauge railroad; but most of the distance he had walked, wading streams, plunging through forests, begging food from artillery and supply kitchens and often going hungry, dodging military police.

He had picked up trail after trail of his division and had followed them to the end, only to discover that the division

had moved somewhere else. He had passed ammunition dumps of huge shells piled high alongside the roads, supply dumps, gun emplacements and heaps of salvaged clothing—ominous signs of the war country—but he had tramped on, believing that once he reached his outfit he would have a rest, a good warm meal, and be among friendly, interested faces. And at last, stumbling along beside some camouflaged batteries that afternoon, he had called out, "What outfit?" and had the satisfaction of hearing, "Twelfth Field, and what's it to you?" He knew then that his own infantry company would be up ahead, for the Twelfth Field Artillery belonged to his division.

He had found his outfit camping in the woods. No shelter but their blankets. No food cooked or to be cooked. Ragged, unshaven. And nearly all of the men were strangers to him. Three of the lieutenants, the captain, and the top sergeant he had never seen before. As for the

men of his own platoon, he knew scarcely half a dozen.

But, worst of all, orders had been received for the division to stand by, ready to move at a moment's notice, and that was what Rainey was laughing about, and why Luke McDermott looked so glum.

"Ol' Luke," said Rainey, chuckling, "comes out of the nice warm hospital and gets back to his outfit just in time to take a big, long hike. Well, don't worry, Luke. It'll give you somethin' to crab about."

Luke contemplated Rainey silently and sourly. He didn't see anything funny in the fact that he had hiked some hundred miles to rejoin his outfit and got there just as they were about to move. But, then, Luke seldom saw the amusing side of any situation. A great number of people, including Rainey, thought it was a pretty good old war, but Luke McDermott was not one of them. Luke thought that all wars were rotten, and the Great War the rottenest of all.

WHAT if the lowest man, the shortest private in the rear rank, did have a steady job, at a dollar a day, a blanket to sleep under, and almost always a can of "Corned Willie" to eat? What if it was true that the corporals and sergeants had never before revealed in so much authority? What if the cooks were growing so fat they could scarcely bend over the field kitchens, and the lieutenants and captains no longer having to work for a living? Luke saw in all this perfect paradise nothing but the meanest, most disagreeable serfdom. "Which no real American," he was fond of saying, "would put up with for ten minutes after we've knocked the enemy into the corner, where he belongs."

"How come you didn't stay in the hospital? Wasn't there enough to crab about back there?" Rainey asked, as he winked elaborately at Jackson, who was busy trying to steal the extra pair of shoes from Luke's pack and exchange them for his own worn hobnails.

Luke tucked in the string of his puttee, caressed his leg, and answered:

"Boy, it's worse back in the S. O. S. than it is up here around the front. I wouldn't stay back there if they made me a general."

"He's safe in sayin' that, ain't he, Jackson?" Rainey grinned.

But Luke said viciously: "I sure am! I wouldn't be a soldier if they handed me Pershing's job. They'll have to hamstring and gag me if they ever want to get me in another war."

"Aw," said Jackson, trying on the extra pair of shoes and scowling with the effort, "you're jist sore because they wouldn't let you lay around the hospital and gold-brick for the rest of the war."

Rainey came to Luke's defense. "That's not it. He's just Luke, that's all, and he'd kick if he had a new rope to hang himself with!"

Luke thought he had stood about enough.

"Listen," he began bitterly. "Listen! You think I had it pretty soft after I stopped that fast one at Soissons, don't you? I suppose you think I was back there leadin' the life o' Riley, with a slug of lead in my shoulder and another in my arm and another one in my leg, while you birds were up at the front!" He paused and kicked at an unoffending stick of wood. "Well, just lemme tell you wise guys that if you're lookin' for a soft billet you better keep away from the S. O. S., 'specially the hospitals. They shag you out of bed and make you line up in the mud three times a day for chow; the orderlies steal your souvenirs and try to make you police up the wards——"

"Did you bust him in the jaw?" asked Jackson.

"I wish I had," said Luke bitterly. "Had plenty of time to do it in, but I was in a hurry to shove off." He gave a sudden dismal croak, as he recollected that he had run away from the hospital, eluded the military police, gone cold and hungry, only to come back to an outfit that was on the move.

"You didn't go A. W. O. L.?" asked Rainey in astonishment.

"Didn't I!" challenged Luke. "I sure did. Lemme tell you the hospital ain't no place for a man with a gimpy leg, not

with the wounded comin' back by the carload and the orderlies makin' you sweep up all the time. I thought," he said ruefully, "you birds might be in a rest camp somewhere."

Rainey jeered. "Rest camp for this outfit! Boy, where's your brains? We ain't done goin' over the top by a long way."

Luke stood up stiffly. "Watch that pack, you guys," he said and limped away toward the smokeless stack of the field kitchen. His leg hurt, and he was hungry. Going absent without leave from the hospital, while his wounded leg was being dressed each day, did not now seem the practical thing he had thought it while he was at the hospital. But that was Luke; he was never satisfied. While he was in the trenches near Verdun, and during his solid month in Belleau Wood, his main idea had been to get wounded. "Just so long as I don't leave too much of me hangin' in the barbed wire to dry up in the sun," he had often said, "I don't care where I get hit. Back in a hospital, where they've got real sheets and bring your chow in to you on real plates—boy, that's where I want to be. I've dodged so many of these Austrian eighty-eights that my spine's all kinked up, and I've stepped high, wide and pretty over so many machine-gun bullets that I go around walkin' like a prancin' horse at a county fair." But when he got what he asked for he didn't want it.

THERE was a friendly face by the soup kitchen, and Luke looked hopeful, as he approached it. Old Givens, the fat cook who had been brewing "slumgullion" for the outfit ever since it was organized, was still there—still with the same small, bright eye, the same greasy shirt and baggy breeches. But in one important way Givens was changed. He seemed more human, a little freer with the stores of supplies that he had always zealously guarded. There being so few old-timers left, he was willing to celebrate the return of Luke McDermott with margarine spread on bread, a spoonful of jam, and coffee.

"Boy, you came up just in time," said

Givens, as Luke unsuspectingly gnawed at the hunk of bread. "I guess you won't see much of this old field kitchen the next few days."

Luke inquired through a mouthful of bread: "How we gonna eat on the march, then?"

"March?" said Givens haughtily. "March? Who said anything about goin' on a march?"

"It's the dope," Luke told him and began to grumble. "I walk my head off to get back to this outfit, and I get here just in time to take a good long hike! If there's anybody that can tie my luck and——"

"Soldier," said Givens impressively, "you'll wish we was on a hike before you're much older. We're gonna be in a mean mess to-morrow."

Luke looked up questioningly and uneasily. He didn't like the tone of Givens' voice. It sounded ominous.

Givens went on: "It's up an' at 'em, first thing in the morning."

Luke choked on the coffee. "You mean we're goin' to make an attack?"

"Bright boy," said Givens. "All set for it," he added smugly; "already got our orders."

Luke slumped lower on the log that served as a chair and uttered lamentations. "Now, if that ain't just my luck! I hike all the way up here, just to get to go over the top again! Man, I'm tired! I need a rest. I've been walkin' my head off!"

But Givens, who, being cook, wouldn't have to go up to the front in any case, was unsympathetic. "What do you think you're bein' paid for? To look pretty? You're a hell of a soldier."

"And to think," moaned Luke, "that I went A. W. O. L. from the hospital just to get into another jam!"

"Lucky if they don't sock you in the hoosegow for it," said Givens.

But Luke loudly disagreed. "Lucky!" he echoed. "Man, I don't even know what that word means!" he said bitterly. "I sure picked a fine outfit to come back to! Don't this division do anything but shoot at the enemy and dodge artillery? I don't want to fight the whole war! I ain't a hog. Why not give somebody

else a chance! I want a rest." He got up disgustedly and went along the path that led through the wood back to his own platoon.

Rainey and Jackson were sitting where he had left them, but there were no signs of the nice new pack he had given over to their care. Even his rifle was gone. But that was a minor worry, one that he could take up any time. His main concern now was whether or not Givens had been speaking the truth about the outfit going into attack. As he came up to them, he heard Rainey say: "Luke, the lieutenant wants you. Said for you to go over to his tent."

Appearing to ignore this, Luke said: "You guys know we're goin' up to the front?"

"You see me shinin' up the old gat, don't you?" answered Rainey.

Luke glumly watched Rainey cleaning the bore of his rifle, then turned. There wasn't any use asking further or making any comment. It was inevitable that the outfit *would* go to the front. It had probably been waiting for him to come back, holding up the attack! He started to prowl through the woods in search of the lieutenant's tent.

His officer was there, talking to Sergeant Cahill. Luke coughed noisily and saluted, as the round-faced lieutenant looked up. "Sir," Luke said, "if there's to be an attack in the morning, I'd kinda like to have a rifle. Somebody swiped mine."

"All right, McDermott," said the lieutenant quickly. "Nobody swiped your rifle; I took it myself. I think," he went on ruminatively—"I think we'll give you an automatic instead. You can get a brand-new one from the supply sergeant."

Luke scowled. "Yes, sir." He went for the supply sergeant. An automatic weighed at least four times as much as an ordinary rifle, and in addition there was a musette bag full of heavy clips of ammunition to be carried with it. He was only too well acquainted with automatics. He had carried one at Belleau Wood, where, in spite of all his grumbling, he had made a pretty good record. He had been beside Lieutenant

Overton, popping away from the hip with an automatic, when they took the first machine-gun emplacement on the day the attack started, and he had carried on pretty well until the end. But that gave him no love for them. They were heavy, bunglesome, and useless at long range.

He found the supply sergeant and told him vindictively: "You can give me that thing if you want to, but you better not get in front of me, big boy. An ordinary Springfield's good enough for me any time and any place. You just keep that flooey gun and tell the lieutenant it's busted. I don't want it."

But the supply sergeant only grinned. "Think how much more you can shoot with it," he said and handed it over.

"All right," said Luke, "but it'll go into the first ditch I see." For Luke McDermott was not Luke McDermott for nothing. He couldn't be brought around to see the bright side of anything. Already his bandaged leg was aching, and he knew that carrying a twenty-odd-pound gun wouldn't make it ache any less.

THAT night there was a thin, silent meal. Afterward, the men sat around for an hour or more and then rolled up in their blankets. It was cold and dark, no fires being permitted. Luke lay down on the damp ground under his thin covering, with his head pillowed on his gas mask.

Meanwhile, the artillery, with which the woods farther back was crowded, made their final preparations for a strong barrage. They had enough shells on hand to devastate the whole sector, and there were plenty of guns to use them. Four regiments of seventy-fives were on hand, and to supplement them were several batteries of six-inch rifles.

The artillery opened up their bombardment before midnight. And at first the bark of the guns and the screech of the shells kept Luke awake. But even Luke McDermott hadn't the heart to complain against the noise made by his own artillery, when it was mowing down and leveling off obstructions which the infantry would have otherwise encoun-

tered when it reached the enemy lines in the morning.

Boom-boom-boom - boom-boom-boom! The shells kept going in a great wide arc until it was as if they were making a canopy of lead in the black sky overhead. There was a continuous whistling in the air, and the ground began to tremble and kept on trembling. Luke fell asleep, thinking grimly: "Those fellows sure are catchin' it." He had never before heard so many guns firing at the same time.

He had slept about three hours, when a hand on his sore shoulder shook him awake. He sat up, feeling for his helmet and automatic rifle. All around him he heard sleepy grumbling from the privates, while the harassed voices of the noncoms tried to assemble their squads, and the authoritative commands of officers sounded:

"All right, up you come. We're going to move forward. Snap it up now. We've only five minutes to get out on the road in formation."

To dress was an easy matter, consisting simply of tying the gas mask under your chin and putting on your steel helmet. Luke got up stiffly, shouldered his automatic rifle and musette bag, and stumbled through the darkness toward the direction from which the voices of the officers and noncoms came:

"Snap it up!"

"Fall in line!"

"Snap into it, you birds!"

"Forward! Close up—close up!"

And then the doughboys were pushing along the path in the pitch-black night on their way to the road which they would follow to the positions that they were to attack from in the morning. And at every step Luke had further proof that he had been a fool to rejoin his outfit. For the road was crowded, and the going was slow. In the sluggishly flowing line, men bumped against one another, stepped on each other's heels, cursed heartily, and went on. Mounted orderlies galloped past, splashing mud and making the infantry crowd over into the ditch. The machine-gun companies, carrying their heavy tripods and boxes of ammunition, lagged back, lost connec-

tion, and had to be waited for. Luke thought of the hospital which he had so abruptly quitted. He thought of the white sheets and comfortable mattresses, the electric lights and clean floors, the kitchens, and the canteens, where you could buy cigarettes and chocolates and listen to the victrola.

ABOVE, the bombardment was continuing, roaring, blaring forth, shaking the ground, as the torrent of shells screamed through the night. Luke dodged, then recollected that it was his own artillery that was doing the firing. The outfit moved on down the road, splitting up to right and left, getting into position. But at last they made a column left into a muddy field that sloped downward. Soon after that they were halted in attack formation to await the signal for the advance.

Within an hour the sky thinned out, and Luke discovered in the glimmering light from the east that he was standing in an old trench, with a hilly field rising in front of it. Beyond that, he didn't know how far away the enemy was. He could see no farther than the string of barbed wire a few yards ahead. Now that he had heard the artillery for some time and was with his outfit at the jumping-off place, he again felt accustomed to his surroundings. It would be exactly the same thing as he had gone through before. Standing by until the zero hour, then the whistle for the advance, and a renewed burst of artillery, and onward with fixed bayonets, behind the curtain of falling shells until the day's objective was reached.

He waited for the signal, listening to the slight, metallic noises made by bayonets being attached to the rifles, clips thrown into the chambers. Some new man was asking plaintively for a match, and nobody was paying any attention to him.

The sound of the silver whistle was low and flutelike, and before it had completely died away there arose on all sides the voices of the officers and sergeants, shouting orders, muttering encouragement. Luke waited for no more. Tightening the strap of his helmet, he clam-

bered over the edge of the trench and was on his way.

It was about four o'clock of an early fall morning, and darkness was just beginning to give place to the real dawn. But the shell holes and tangles of barbed wire underfoot were not yet to be discerned, and Luke had twice wrenched his sore leg before he went very far. The leg began to hurt, as he pushed on, in a manner that could not be disregarded. He kept thinking of it and worrying because he might be forced to stop. A battlefield, he fully realized, is not a particularly good place for a man to sit down.

No; that would never do. The only way out of it was to get on as swiftly as he could and to hope that the barrage had driven the enemy out before he reached their trenches. In case they had fallen back, there would go to him the first choice of the loaves of black bread, the jars of apple butter, and cans of honey which they invariably left behind them in their retreat. If it worked, he would not only have a place to rest, but food as well, and he was badly in need of both.

Before the darkness lifted, he got some distance ahead of the first wave, the snout of his automatic thrust out before him and his finger touching the trigger. For there was no telling what might happen, when he would run into a group of foes, and it was best to be prepared. And, going along beneath the shells that ripped overhead in the thinning sky, Luke reflected bitterly on his predicament. Here he was in an attack, when he might have been asleep in a warm bed. Prowling toward the enemy, with a gimpy leg, not knowing what was to come of it! And those confounded shells! Pretty soon, he knew from experience, the enemy would retaliate with their own artillery. As for the machine-gun and rifle fire, he could expect them at any moment.

BUT he went on, hobbling a little more at every step. When he had to swing his left leg forward, he needed greater effort. Every time he felt certain that he couldn't go ahead, and every time he

did go ahead, up and down the hill, over the shell-torn field.

Over to the right, a streak of color appeared in the sky. Objects on the desolate ground grew plain. He saw old boots, rotting French gas masks, unexploded shells. Ahead of him was a hump, gray and barren. Machine-gun bullets, fired from some distance ahead, spurted over it. He could see them occasionally ripping through the dirt. While he remained in the hollow, he was safe from them. But he couldn't stay in the hollow. He climbed the hill to face the stream of lead, going on his way.

Those bullets went at his legs, like a million hornets turned loose. He stood for a breath in the direct fire, then ran down the opposite slope. Halfway to the bottom he stopped. A few feet away he saw the opening of a shaft that had been dug into the ground, exposing a great, shadowy mouth lined with timbers. A dugout! Just what he had been looking for! He could stop there while he rested his leg. Maybe he could fix the bandage which seemed to have slipped a little from the wound. A good thing he was ahead of the first wave. He would have time to sit down a while before they caught up—and in a fine, safe place, just as if it had been made to order.

Luke crawled to the edge of the hole and peered down into the blackness. There was nothing to be seen. But to assure himself that the dugout was unoccupied, he pointed the barrel of his automatic and called loudly: "Hey, you! Come outa that! Beat it!"

He was answered by silence, deep and still. Well, it was all right. He would go down. He put his left foot on the first step, when he was halted by the feeling that he had heard a noise below. He drew back. Better be sure there was nobody down there. He shouted again: "If I throw a hand grenade, I'll bet you'll snap out of it. Come on now!" he commanded threateningly, thrusting the snout of the automatic farther into the pit.

There was a bleat that rose above a hurried string of gutturals. Luke started, astonished and a little scared. Good Lord! There was somebody down there!

He hadn't counted on that. Clenching his automatic, he pushed it even deeper into the darkness.

But no more threats were needed. Luke heard footsteps on the stairs, and a white, screwed-up face beneath a round, cloth cap appeared, hands held up tremblingly.

"So," jeered Luke, "you were hidin', were you, you fool!"

Luke's voice quavered. For another face and another pair of upraised hands had come into sight. Luke gulped and motioned for the newcomer to stand beside the first man. "Two of you, hey! I bet you two birds would have chopped me into sausage, if I'd gone down there first."

But Luke's voice broke completely. A third scared man was scrambling into view, trying to get up the steep steps and yet keep his hands well up in the air. Luke's eyes popped. He had no more than lined up the third prisoner when a fourth blinked into sight. It was getting to be too much for him. He felt as if he were being surrounded by the whole enemy army. Here came a fifth. And at sight of him Luke could scarcely hold the ominous barrel of the automatic so that it would not shake and fall from his hands.

"How many more of you birds down there?" he shouted menacingly at his prisoners, but from the blankness in their scared faces he knew it would be useless to ask again. The dugout had sheltered an even half dozen, at least, for another had just come up and had fallen in line with his grimy hands above his head. And then another, and one more.

Then there was a pause, and Luke thought, "Well, I guess that's all." He was a little perplexed and began to wonder what he would do with them. They must have souvenirs! And souvenirs, in case he was sent back to the hospital again, would bring plenty of money, if only he could keep them out of sight of the hospital orderlies.

But the appearance of the ninth and tenth prisoners cut short his speculating and assured him that there must be still more below, some that were naturally timid about exposing themselves. He

bawled down into the hole: "All right, you birds! If I turn this gun loose, I'll bet you'll scamper——"

AT that the procession recommenced.

They streamed out. There were fat fathers and downy-cheeked youths, slim tall men, slim short men, fat short men, burly men, professorial-looking gentlemen and very military-looking men, but they all had tortured faces and held high their shaking hands. Luke began to count them, but he couldn't. There were thirty, at the least, he decided, as the hole was emptied. Half a platoon! And from what he could see there was not a respectable souvenir among them!

Luke commanded: "Forward!" Then he acted out the order by jabbing the muzzle of the automatic into the side of the man on the end. The march began.

It was uncomfortable for a moment, as the docile column crossed over the rise where the bullets whirled, and Luke was afraid they would break and scatter. He hurried them forward. And once on the other side, the prisoners stepped along obediently.

About a rod from the rise, Luke met his own first wave advancing. They had their rifles aimed at the enemy group and incidentally at Luke. And one of the new men had pulled the trigger before McDermott could find voice to shout: "You big stiffs! Don't you go bumpin' off my prisoners! Get some of your own, if you want any target practice."

Then there were voices:

"Well, if it ain't old Luke McDermott!"

"You lucky bum!"

"Where d'ja get all them prisoners?"

"That boy'll sure get a medal of honor for this!"

"He sure will," said the lieutenant.

But the few old-timers were silent, waiting for Luke to say something before herding his prisoners back of the lines. Rainey and Jackson listened.

"What of it!" they heard Luke say glumly. He could always find something wrong with almost anything that happened. "Just my luck! There ain't a first-class souvenir in the whole dog-goned bunch!" and he limped away.



The Wedding in Gulkana

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "The Totem of Respectability," "The Chandalar," Etc.

Private Diehl, government telegrapher stationed at Gulkana, Alaska, claimed that nothing ever happened in that isolated arctic waste. In fact, he was just remarking about that when in walked two Indian women.

THE snow pack was four feet thick on the roof of the military telegraph station at Gulkana, and the temperature low enough to freeze arabesque designs on the inside of the windowpanes, within five paces of the glowing Yukon stove. On such a night as this, a New England father, with sporting instincts, could enjoy driving his erring son from his door. He would congeal to the consistency of ice before he arrived at the first milepost, with its yellow finger pointing off into the sparkling, moonlit wilderness.

No wind; not a breath stirring outside the cabin. Inside, cheerfulness, warmth, and the smell of good tobacco—that and the clicking of the telegraph sounder. Private Diehl of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable & Telegraph System was conversing, with staccato stabs of his forefinger. A hundred miles down the trail, at another one-man station, Tieh-

kell by name, Sergeant Brogan was conversing back.

"Lonesome down here, if it wasn't for the huskies, and one of them got loose to-night and tore around the house for about an hour. Guess it must be close to seventy," said Brogan.

"Huskies and the malemutes in the Indian village across the river raising the devil here, too," replied Diehl. "I'm figuring on putting on a caribou mulligan to-morrow. Wish you were up here to dip in with your knife."

"Sounds good. Anything new up your way?"

"Not a thing. What in the devil *could* happen up here? Nothing but Siwashes around, since the trail closed."

"And yet they talk about the romantic North," scoffed Brogan.

"It's the bunk. I'd give my hard-boiled Sunday shirt to be mixed up in something funny and interesting, such

as you get all the time in the States," rapped Diehl.

"Me, too. Like to do something to justify my existence."

"That's my notion. I'd like to cut quite a swath, let people know I'm around, play the big guy. Wait a minute. No; it's good night. Somebody at the door. Call me to-morrow."

Somebody was at the door, pounding to be let in.

With an excited "Huh!" Diehl pushed back his chair, kicked open the draft of his stove, and swung wide the portal of his hospitable lodge.

Two women, Siwashes both, floundered past him, accompanied by an inrush of frigid atmosphere which seemed to cling to their rabbit-skin parkas. With Indian stolidity they advanced on the stove and divested themselves of their outer garments, piling them in the wood box.

Diehl, tall, dark, heavy set—a typical energetic, self-reliant soldier of "the system," pushed a couple of chairs within reach of his visitors and invited them to sit. One of them he knew. The older woman was the interpreter from the Indian village across the river.

The other was a stranger, young and somewhat fair to look upon, considering her kind. Moreover, her eyes danced with tense excitement, and her small, brown hands worked nervously with the fringe of her gingham blouse.

"What you want, Anna Kee?" he asked of the older woman. "You come me about something *hoylo* trouble, huh?"

"Where you ketchum *hoylo* trouble?" demanded Anna sourly. "Wasilla here, she gal Chief Tione set down Chitnow way. You got talking wire; she make *wah-wah* daddie—savvy? Mebbeso ketchum man. Looksee what daddie say."

"Oh, ho!" said the soldier. "The little miss has fallen in love, has she? Who's the lucky guy?"

"Tenas Tom, you call 'Little Tom,'" replied the older woman smugly. "Daddie set down 'nother tribe, big chief. No like, mebbeso. She wanta looksee."

Diehl, whose watchword was "Service," went to the telephone and, after repeated ringing, awoke the Chitnow "cen-

tral." In due time she connected him with Big Chief Tione's lodge. Then, by holding the girl's head in the proper position and pressing the receiver to her ear, he established the final liaison.

Wasilla began to lisp, gurgle, and choke Chinook into the transmitter, telescoping one word into another with such terrible earnestness that the soldier felt his sympathy go out to her.

Evidently Big Chief Tione, who "set down Chitnow," ninety miles from Gulkana, did not care for the alliance proposed by the princess, his daughter. Not a word of English was spoken, for the girl knew none, but it was quite certain he was biased from the emphasis which carried the chief's gutturals clearly to the soldier's ears. Even without that, one would know it from the pleading tones employed by little Wasilla. The incoming gutturals became louder and louder, then suddenly stopped, culminating in a sharp click.

THE girl sprang up angrily, exclaiming something in Chinook that cut the air like a dog whip.

"She say damn hell fire, she do mebbeso what she want," interpreted Anna Kee. "She say she ketchum Little Tom next day, savvy? Chief Tione say no ketchum. She say she ask you make *wah-wah* white-man way—marry 'em. Mebbeso!"

"Well, I'd like to help the little devil," assured Diehl meditatively, "but no ketchum the proper *wah-wah*, never having been a preacher, or a justice of the peace. Better tell her to mush now and think it over."

The women "mushed" out into the night, and Diehl tried to awaken Brogan at Tiehkell to ask him if he had ever married any one or seen it done, but failed to elicit a response.

An hour later he was just making ready for bed, when again there came a rapping on the door. This time it was a large delegation of Indian "officials" from across the river. They were the president, the "high council," the "middle council," the "low council," the marshal, the treasurer and the witch doctor, or shaman.

It might be explained here that that is the way the average Indian village of Alaska is organized.

The president is head man and judicial chief of the town, the final authority in a dispute. He is assisted by the high, middle and low councils, who are his board of aldermen and rank as indicated. The marshal has power to arrest, confine, or banish miscreants found guilty of infringement of tribal laws by the president and his staff. All of these functionaries have duties analogous to civilized government. It is only when you come to the treasurer and the shaman that you approach the weird in municipal organization. The treasurer keeps an extensive set of books and enters in them the village expenditures and levies, his own personal accounts as a fur dealer, and whatever bits of local gossip and scandal he can pick up. A typical entry reads something like this:

Skookim Charlie he sell village one half day work two dollars and his wife mebbeso she sell fur to 'nother man who set down over near Tonsina way.

The shaman is the man who scares away the "Mahonie," or bush devil, and fastens sticks to the baby's ears to cure whooping cough.

All of these gentry, above described by way of introduction, brought in some more cold air, coupled with the obnoxious odor of freshly tanned hides; which meant that the house would have to be aerated before any human being, except a Siwash, could sleep in it, and therefore that the temperature would be correspondingly lowered, at the time Diehl would be undressing for bed.

Making the best of it, however, the soldier searched the place for sufficient chairs and bade his guests "squat." They did so with sundry grunts of satisfaction. Each solemn Siwash thereupon pulled a pipe, loaded it up, and proceeded to smoke in gloomy silence. The air grew heavy with waiting.

Twenty minutes later the president, Henry Longboy, arose and began a speech.

"Tenas Tom, he say he get married gal of Big Chief Tione, set down Chitnow

way. Savvy? Big Chief Tione he say Tenas Tom no dam good marry Wasilla. Mebbeso! Me don't think."

"Yes," said Diehl. "She told me all about it."

"Good!" said Henry Longboy. "What now? We come see you."

"Are they twenty-one?" inquired the soldier, judicially, blowing a long, thin jet of cigarette smoke from his nostrils.

"Yep! Bot' twenty-one."

"Well, then, they can get married white-man way!" exclaimed Diehl. "Get a preacher or something. Tell the old chief go take a look at the back of his neck."

"Yep! So we think. Who marry 'em white-man way?" Longboy demanded.

"You tell me," countered Diehl.

"No ketchum preacher. You big gov'ment man; s'pose you make *wah-wah*. Savvy? *Hy-yu* trouble, mebbeso, byem by. Big Chief Tione bust Injun wedding right off. Me know that dam so. You see; you make *wah-wah* white-man way. Nobody else."

"I'll do it, if I've got to," promised Diehl doubtfully. "When is the big wedding to be pulled off?"

The treasurer consulted a huge ledger which up to that moment he had kept concealed under his parka.

"To-morrow, three o'clock," he declared in mission-school English.

"All right. I think I can manage it. I will be over at Tenas Tom's place at three."

"We come get you," promised the president. "You big gov'ment man. I walk with you. Do you big honor."

ONE by one and with great dignity they arose, wrapped their parkas closely around their squat figures and took their departure in order of rank. Diehl closed the door with a bang after them, meditated a few moments on marriage, the one coming up to-morrow, others he had read about or heard of—a particular girl in Tacoma he would rather like to wed at no distant date. He fell to wondering what *this* girl would think of Gulkana and its primitive people. If they had children, would they grow up in mortal terror of the "Mahonie?" At last, he arose

languidly and repaired to bed beneath an eiderdown mattress, four inches thick. He slept well, and, because there was a brittle, cold current of air washing across his brow, dreamed of plunging through snowdrifts and Sergeant Brogan, looking for a malemute with a broken leg, that howled and howled from a point always just out of reach.

On or about the appointed hour the following afternoon, the entire delegation of Indian officials were back at the telegraph shanty. Diehl took his place at the left of Henry Longboy; the others fell into an irregular file behind, and they mushed down the short stretch of snowy road, over the frosty bridge, and thus finally to Tenas Tom's cabin.

A Siwash cabin is not much different from any other man's house in the sub-arctic, when you view it from a distance. Inside, it is either overcrowded with, or barren of, furniture depending largely on what kind of a "hand" the householder held at last night's poker tournament. Every living Siwash is an inveterate and reckless gambler.

Tenas Tom, smart, undersized and as ugly as a puffin's chick, evidently had been playing in poor luck recently, for the single room was stripped to a stove, a large dining-room table, and a floor bunk of greasy wolf robes. Evidently, these deficiencies had been noted by his fellow townsmen, for the table was piled halfway to the ceiling with wonderful wedding presents—rifles, shotguns, steel traps, snares, blankets, gingham, parkas, mukluks. Everything dear to an Indian's heart was piled there, representative of the largess of a big-hearted and simple-minded village. And, sitting on the floor or standing in groups, the excited donors were discussing the imminent social event, smoking, eating candy, drinking home-brewed beverages, that smelled like a sour dishrag, but concealed a potent wallop. Wasilla, pretty as an Arab houri, squatted apart, self-conscious and fidgety under the eyes of the multitude. For all Gulkana apparently was in that one room. Ever and anon, her sloe-black orbs traveled from Tenas Tom's grinning features to those of the soldier and back again.

Henry Longboy, steaming in furry garments and shoe pacs, beside the stove, at last raised a grimy hand for silence. The place immediately became as still as a funeral house.

"I will make spooch," he announced solemnly.

The president began to talk in a rambling manner, shifting from one foot to the other, making slow, heavy gestures like a boy swimming dog fashion. What he said was in the extreme of good taste, so far as Diehl could see.

It was good, he declared, for people to get married. Every one should do that. *He* had done it several times himself. Always it was the right thing to do under the circumstances.

Here, he pointed out, was Wasilla and Tenas Tom, known as Little Tom, following presumably in the path of their forbears. It was good. They should be commended and helped. All of these presents showed the good esteem in which both the bride and the groom were held. Let them be happy and accept gifts, for there were only two times when they were offered—at a person's wedding and at his funeral.

"I have make talk," he declared in conclusion. "Let high council he make talk with Tenas Tom and see if it all good we go ahead make 'em marry white-man way."

THE high council, Pete Muk-u-to, stalked gravely to where stood Little Tom and conversed with him rapidly in Chinook.

Tom shook his head in negation to something high council had asked. The latter expostulated at length and then turned away angrily.

"He make lie talk," he proclaimed with injured dignity. "He not twenty-one—mebbeso! He don't know how dam ol' he is."

Then he strode eagerly over to the table and, with a triumphant air, abstracted from the pile the finest rifle in sight.

The guests all arose and surged toward the gift table, with the obvious intention of helping themselves but Henry Longboy again held up his hand.

"Me got question," he told them. "You set down!"

When order was finally restored, he proceeded with a long Chinook harangue which appeared to put the groom on the witness stand. It turned out that the president, with his eye on a splendid set of snowshoes, was trying to get the groom to admit he had infringed a tribal law in asking a woman of an alien tribe to be his wife. To this Tom seemed to have answered that the fault was Wasilla's, who, having trouble at home, was trying to attach herself elsewhere. The effect of this statement on the girl was as instantaneous as it was disconcerting. She rushed to the gift table, seized a snowshoe and brought it down with spiteful force on the groom's head. Immediately they clinched in sanguinary conflict, the fur from their garments flying, as they wrestled and struck. Henry Longboy, not being able to get his talons on the gift of his choice, stalked over to the table and became absorbed in settling on a string of traps, a shotgun, and a pair of beaded mukluks, while the marshal ran around in circles, yelling for the embattled couple to have done and let the ceremony proceed. "Hi! Hi! Hi!" screamed the marshal. Then with a "bang" the conflict stopped.

"The bride wins," Diehl boomed above the gurgling clamor, as Wasilla, getting one arm free at last, put Tom out for the count, with a lash of her sturdy weapon. The Siwash settled back on his haunches with a sigh, closed his eyes, and then collapsed, full length, on the floor.

"Now!" exclaimed the soldier, "me take charge of this *hoylo* meeting. You all do same as I say. Douse cold water on Tom's face and me tie plenty knot."

Two old squaws went outside and brought in presently handfuls of snow, with which to bathe the bruised brow of the fallen gladiator, who was to be the groom. While this was going on, the middle council, the low council, the marshal, the treasurer and the shaman were pawing over the presents, taking what they thought was due them for such services as they believed they had rendered.

At last, the groom opened his eyes and

looked around, a startled look in his stupid black eyes.

"How come ketchum sorehead?" he gurgled, cocking his wounded cranium on one side and allowing his mouth to drop open like a barn door on loose hinges, displaying two staggering rows of tobacco-stained snags.

"Your bride to be crowned you queen of the May and nothing but," advised Diehl. "I guess she's a good squaw, what?"

"I t'ink mebbeso," admitted Tom. "Me ketchum marry Wasilla already?"

"Not yet. You've just gone through the preliminaries. The worst follows in six sterling reels of good comedy. Now sit up and take your medicine.

"Wasilla," said Diehl, "come running. Here's your mate, ready to be tied. Freeze onto his flipper."

Anna Kee couldn't interpret this to the girl.

"Tell her me ready now ketchum marry. Savvy?" he expounded. "She take his hand, *hoylo* squeeze, me make *hy-yu wah-wah*—all done, white-man way."

THE old woman blubbered the words into Chinook, and the bride lisped, gurgled and choked back.

"She say," explained Anna Kee, "she take Little Tom, she boss; all time set down he work. She say Tenas Tom no plenty good. Same way, Indian she marry set down Chitnow, longo."

"My gosh!" exclaimed Diehl. "This marrying business gets more ramified every minute. Hey, Henry Longboy—what now?"

"You say!" wisely ruled the president of the village.

"Hey, Little Tom, what you say? Your bride already got man."

"Me got squaw, too," calmly declared Tom. "Big fat squaw. She gone 'nother man, longo."

"Ask her," Diehl instructed the interpreter, "if she lose um husband?"

"Yeh!" replied Anna Kee. "Him frozen feet—leave him longo. She fourteen, mebbeso. Savvy?"

"All right, then. I guess that makes everything square up with sky-pilot regu-

lations. "They're part-way widows, anyway. Come on, Wasilla!"

The girl shrugged but did not show signs of moving.

"Follow me, Tom," commanded the soldier. Tom struggled to his feet. As he did so, Diehl grasped him firmly around the body and hurried him to his fate.

"Sit down!" he roared. "Take the lady's hand. Hold tight, Wasilla! Make talk, *hoylo wah-wah*, Anna Kee. Hold it, Tom!"

The soldier reached in his pocket for his Bible, fumbled through the pages, discovered he had picked up the wrong book, and got "Field Service Regulations," instead. He coughed a moment to cover his surprise and then, with elocutionary effect, read half of one page, devoted to an advance of infantry, by infiltration.

"Now, damn it," he concluded viciously, "you're married."

"Zat all?" inquired Henry Longboy.

"They're tied," opined Diehl. "It's what the chief signal officer would call a 'standard practice Western Union splice.'"

He drew a ring out of his pocket. It was of enduring iron, a converted horse-shoe nail, in fact. This he slipped onto Wasilla's finger. Much too large, it hung from the slender digit, like a barrel hoop from a peg.

The girl and Tom began to speak to each other in Chinook.

"They say," said Anna Kee, "they *hoylo* happy, Big Chief Tione no set down ketchum bust up wedding."

Diehl wondered what the treasurer was writing in his ledger. Probably a record of the affair, interpolated between accounts where the village had fed dogs from Tetling or Mentasta. Something seemed to be going on at the gift table. All present, except himself and the bride and groom, were gathered there, babbling

excitedly, taking back their gifts or swapping them with one another. In five minutes the board was as bare of presents as the tundra outside was of tropical verdure. To his astonishment, some of the women late at retrieving, turned their attentions hungrily to the bride, and began to remove articles of finery donned for the occasion. A buck, likewise disappointed, took the groom's felt socks.

When four squaws fought and yanked to remove Wasilla's gingham blouse, Diehl thundered at them to let be. This was misunderstood by the bride to mean that the soldier wanted the token for himself, so she demurely wriggled out of what remained of the garment and offered it to the soldier, without a trace of embarrassment or chagrin.

"Wasilla say," interpreted Anna Kee, "you dam fine *hoylo* gov'ment man; mebbeso you take all she got. She sorry you no wear um skirt. Mebbeso Tom make um give pants."

"No ketchum," Diehl returned firmly. "No ketchum waist; no ketchum pants. Ketchum plenty one day. Good-by."

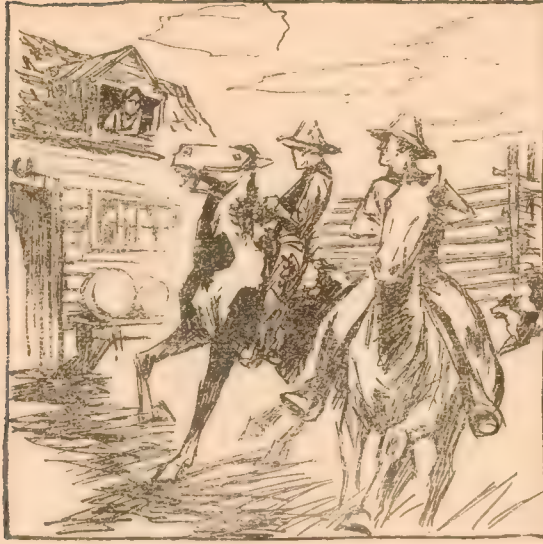
On the way back to the signal station, Diehl wondered what the girl in Tacoma would think if she had to be married in the Siwash fashion.

At ten o'clock that night, Sergeant Brogan rapped out a call for Diehl on the sounder.

"Pretty dead down here," said Brogan. "When I got the loose hound up last night he had chewed up most of his harness. This is a heck of a country. Nothing doing but dog howls."

"Same here," mourned Diehl's facile, tapping finger, on the key. "Wish I had a job in the States where I could bust myself, doing something unusual and interesting. All I've done to-day was idle at the key and listen to malemites. And—oh, yes!—there was one break in the monotony. I attended a wedding in Gulkana."





Points West

By B. M. Bower

Author of "For the Good of the Service," Etc.

Young Cole Lawson, the Western lad who turned his back to troubles, returns at last, the full figure of a man, to face and end them.

IN FOUR PARTS—PART IV.

CHAPTER XXII.

TENTATIVE PROPOSALS.

MEEETING Billy Parrish without look or word of recognition was one of the most difficult experiences Cole had ever known, but he accomplished it, somehow. A flicker of Billy's eyes, a twitching of his lips, and he was stiff, uncompromising, hostile. But big Bill Saunders inexorably pushed to the front of the conversation, chewing his inevitable toothpick and darting quick glances around the cell, as he spoke.

"This is a deputy sheriff from Black Rim County, Cole," he announced in his rumbling drawl. "He says you stole four horses over that way and brought 'em into Crater County. Says you took 'em from young Lawson—C-Bar-L horses."

"That's news to me," grunted Cole, turning away because he could not bear to face Billy Parrish in that guise.

"Young Cole Lawson wrote back from

Seattle and told about it, and he described you to a finish. Parrish here can identify the horses."

"Let him, then!"

"You tell where the other three are, and mebbe there won't be any charge brought against you. What he wants now is to get the kid's horses back."

"That's nothing to me," Cole said shortly, backing away to sit down.

"Ain't, huh? Well, I guess you better come on out to the office where we can have a little talk with yuh." Saunder's tone was grim, as he unlocked the door. "I guess you'll find out it's quite a lot to yuh. Come on outa there!"

He looked so bulky and capable a representative of that dread thing, the law, that Cole's shoulders drooped a little, as he glared at the two, without moving. It was not until Saunders took a threatening step into the room that Cole got up and went out sullenly. Even Shorty must see that he had no choice in the

matter, he thought, as he glanced back over his shoulder.

"Say, Cole, you're looking thin. What you been doing to yourself?" Billy Parrish muttered solicitously, as Cole brushed by him. "I never saw yuh look so——"

"Shut up!" Cole warned him under his breath. "That fellow in there'll hear you."

Billy glanced over his shoulder to where Shorty stood watching them go; then he turned toward Saunders who was coming behind. Whatever he had to say must wait until they were safely shut into the office, he remembered.

It must have been a good deal, for it was a full hour before Saunders brought Cole back to the cell. Shorty was sitting with his elbows on his knees and his hands loosely clasped between them, staring abstractedly at the floor. He looked up under his eyebrows, as Cole came in, his eyes fixed inquiringly on Cole's sullen face.

"Well, did you cough up the information?" Shorty's voice was tinged with mockery. It was like the expression Cole sometimes saw in Shorty's eyes, a look that made Cole wonder if he were quite convincing in his rôle of bad man.

"They know already where one horse is." Cole pulled himself together, and with a long breath of weariness slipped on the mask. "I rode him into town. That damn deputy identified him as a C-Bar-L horse."

"Yeah? That makes it look kinda bad for you, don't it?"

Cole started to roll a cigarette with fingers that shook. For answer he shrugged his shoulders.

"C Bar L—that's the outfit that went broke, ain't it? Old man shot himself—blowed his brains out. Was you there?"

Cole was moistening the edge of paper with his tongue, and he stared at Shorty over his two hands, his eyes black and shining in the half light of the room.

"I didn't have to be," he said evenly, while he shaped the little tube. "Young Lawson started off this way with his horses. I met him the other side of Thunder Pass."

"You sure took a chance," was Shorty's

comment. "Gosh, it was lonesome while you was gone. Thought maybe that deputy from Black Rim was goin' to glom you and take you away from here."

"Nothing like that. They tried to get me to tell 'em where the other three horses are."

"Did yuh?"

"No." Cole sat down and smoked moodily. Shorty got up and began walking up and down, up and down, head bent and shoulders sagged forward. At first, Cole paid no attention to him; but the clocklike regularity with which Shorty's booted feet passed within Cole's range of vision finally registered a mechanical kind of attention on Cole's mind, and he pulled his thoughts slowly away from a heartsick dwelling upon the Black Rim country and the grisly tragedy of the C Bar L. The fact forced itself upon his mind that Shorty was upset.

DID Shorty possess any guilty knowledge of the operation of this Crater County gang? It did not seem so, and Saunders had not been surprised when Cole reported that he had gleaned nothing whatever from his cellmate. He had merely remarked that Shorty could probably do a lot for Cole after he got out of jail; knowing Roper, as Shorty must, from having worked for him, Shorty's word would go a long way toward convincing Roper that Cole was an outlaw from some other section of the range. Cole had told Billy and Saunders that Shorty was too easy-going a type to be mixed up in anything outside the law, and that he lacked the quick wit which one of Roper's gang must have.

Now Cole's abstraction was broken by Shorty's restless pacing to and fro. Three steps on the floor, and Shorty's feet went past. Another step and a turn, and here came the feet again. Small feet—the smallest Cole had ever seen on a man so tall. Shorty must be close to six feet in his boots. Three steps, a turn, three steps back, and the boots going by; left heel run over on the outside, right heel worn on the inside edge. Shorty did that by always standing "hip shot," his weight resting almost entirely on his left leg. Shiny streaks showed on the counters,

where his spurs had rubbed; the legs of the boots were stitched in red thread, an oblong scroll pattern, such as Cole had written over and over in his penmanship books at school, during the half-hour writing lesson.

He wished he dared talk frankly with Shorty and tell him just what was the problem that faced him. Knowing John Roper, Shorty might be able to give him good advice. He had even suggested to Saunders that he confide in Shorty, because he felt that Shorty liked him and half suspected that he was not so black as he painted himself. Shorty was a good-natured, harmless sort, like nine tenths of the riders on the range. He had probably worked for Roper and never dreamed that the ranch was a blind, and that Roper's real business lay deeper and far more hidden than Crater County knew.

Back and forth the feet crossed rhythmically the square of stone floor directly before Cole, who finished his cigarette and sat erect. Almost as if that were a signal, Shorty stopped and faced him, his lips parted in a half smile.

"Gosh, that throwed a scare into me, havin' yuh gone so long," he said, when Cole looked up at him inquiringly. "Had the blue willies ever since. Sure they ain't plannin' on takin' yuh outa here?"

"I guess they couldn't do that till my ninety days are up," Cole said after a moment of hesitation. "That's a long time from now. I'll maybe get a chance to beat it before then."

"Sh-sh," warned Shorty, whose keen ears had detected a sound in the corridor. "Dick's takin' his time to-night, but I guess that's our supper."

His guess was correct. They ate in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. But afterward Shorty threw off his moodiness and wanted to talk about the only incident that had broken into the monotony of their cloistered days.

"If you didn't open up this time and tell 'em," he began abruptly, "they're liable to haul yuh out there again and try to make yuh come through, don't yuh think?"

"They wouldn't get any more than they've got now."

"Didn't they say anything about you thinkin' it over and maybe decidin' to tell 'em to-morrow?"

"No. I got the impression that Black Rim deputy is leaving town in the morning. The sheriff said something about going along."

THIS, it happened, was the truth. Billy and Saunders planned to visit the Harris ranch and have a long, confidential talk with Mrs. Harris and Dorothy. Cole's earnest assurance that they were his friends and could be trusted with the true story—which he secretly wanted them to hear, now that he knew the truth about his father—had done much to influence the sheriff.

Billy Parrish had enthusiastically suggested that the women be permitted to visit the jail and smuggle a hack-saw blade in to Cole, perhaps in a watermelon. He had argued that a woman hates to see any man she likes in jail, and even Roper's gang would accept their coming as perfectly natural. But Cole had talked against that plan. He did not want Dorothy to see him behind the bars.

"Say, didn't that deputy recognize yuh, Cole? He sure had a funny look on his face when you went to the door."

"He thought I'd been passing myself off for young Lawson, and he wanted to see if I could get away with it, I guess."

"I know. I heard what he said, comin' down the hall. Say, what's he goin' to leave town for, if you didn't tell him where the horses is?"

"I didn't tell, but they cross-questioned me and got enough so they think they can find 'em, all right. They're going to look."

"Where's that?"

"That's out at Harris' place." There was no reason why Shorty should not know, Cole reflected. It would furnish the reason why Mrs. Harris or Dorothy should come to visit him. "I was there, and they know I had the horses there." He sighed, more than half sincerely. "I wish I could 'a' got word out to Mrs. Harris," he added.

"Why not the girl?" Shorty slyly hinted.

"Or Dorothy. They're good friends of mine. They'd help me. Maybe they will, anyway," he forced himself to add hopefully. "I asked the sheriff to bring in my war bag so I'll have a change of clothes. Maybe——"

"You sure they're goin' out to-morrow?" Shorty insisted.

"Well, they said so. If they do, maybe the women will think of some way——"

Shorty came over and sat down beside Cole, laying a hand on his shoulder, with an impressive gesture.

"I got a scheme that beats settin' here and waiting for somethin' to happen," he said, speaking in a guarded undertone. "You've been talkin' about bustin' outa here till I've got the itch myself to go."

He got up and went to the door, looked out and listened, and came back again.

"How?" Cole looked up at him, startled. It was the first time Shorty had ever shown any great interest in the idea of escape.

Shorty hesitated, looking down at him. He shook his head, as he seated himself again on the cot.

"How, I ain't tellin' yet." Then he grinned. "You been wantin' to go so bad, when I do let yuh in on it, I expect yuh to play right up. You've got every reason for gettin' outa here; me, I'm all right, but I wouldn't want to stay here alone after you went. This afternoon showed me how I've got used to havin' yuh around. Why, I felt like bellerin' like a cow that's lost her calf!"

"Thanks. I didn't know I was that important."

"Well, I like yuh, dawg-gone it. You're a mighty good card player, and, besides—— Now, how have you been figurin' on gettin' away, once you got outa here? Bein' a stranger——"

"I thought I'd maybe find John Roper's place and ask him for that job he offered me." Cole said deliberately. "I know he's no friend of Saunders', for he told me so. He said the sheriff stands in with a bunch of thieves that got away with some horses of his. I don't know anything about that—maybe I believed it and maybe I didn't. But, whichever way it is, Roper and Saunders don't hit it off so good. I guess he'd kinda keep

me outa sight for a while, don't yuh think?"

"Sure. I know Roper like a book. Rode for him, two round-ups. Know how to find his place?"

Cole admitted that he did not, and Shorty grinned again.

"I guess you need me in your business, kid," he dryly commented, as he got out his cards and seated himself cross-legged on the floor, where the light was strongest. "Want a game?"

Cole was in no mood for cards, and said so; whereupon Shorty resigned himself to the monotony of solitaire, spreading his cards on the floor and whistling absently to himself, as he played endlessly, humped forward like a decrepit range version of Buddha, letting chances go by, as the cards slipped under his thumb. Shorty's wits, too, were wool-gathering that night.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHORTY'S WAY OUT.

FOR a while Cole watched him listlessly, his thoughts wandering here and there over his immediate past and the ominous haze of the future, but occupying themselves mostly with Billy Parrish and the things he had said. It had been like jabbing an old bruise to see Billy, but it was good to hear all the news about the boys, and to know just what had been done to establish Cole firmly in his alibi at Seattle.

Cole had written to Billy—Saunders had mysteriously furnished him with stationery from a cheap hotel near the water front, as a convincing detail—and had sent various messages to the boys and a beaded watch fob for Billy himself. So now, having received the letter and passed it around in the Lava Pool Hall, where range men were wont to for-gather, Black Rim was firmly convinced that young Cole Lawson was on his way to Alaska, on board the old *City of Seattle*, and that he had been held up ten miles from the railroad and robbed of his horses and camp outfit, but had continued his journey nevertheless. He had not wanted Black Rim to have the laugh on him, he had said. He had beaten his

way through on a freight train to save his money, and he was going to ship as a deck hand for the same reason. He had damned the climate of Seattle, just as any sagebrusher would, and had declared he was not coming back until he had made a stake and could buy back the old home ranch. He had given a very good description of the horse thief—which tallied closely with Cole himself—and he had begged Billy to have Ed Carroll get on the fellow's trail.

It was "a peach of a letter," Billy had declared, and now half of the boys had the Klondike fever, and it looked as if Red and Gene might go; only they were debating over working through fall round-up first. Musing on the triumph of that epistolary stratagem, he felt a boyish thrill of pride in his handiwork.

Then Billy had told of a strange rider who had appeared in Lava and seemed to be looking for work, though not with any great anxiety to find it. Since strangers were persons of especial interest to Carroll, he had quietly investigated this one and found that until very lately he had been a Muleshoe man. He had shown a suspicious interest in Black Rim affairs, Billy said, and, although none of the boys knew there was any doubt cast upon the C-Bar-L suicide, they did not like Dirk Tracey and gave him the cold shoulder. Billy had described him to Cole, but without learning anything new, since Cole had not seen him. To Cole's instant suspicion that Tracey might be the murderer, Billy had replied that Carroll had established an alibi that evening for the fellow. He had been seen in Lava too late in the afternoon to have any possible hand in the killing.

"But I believe I saw the man that did it," Billy had continued. "You remember I was riding over beyond the butte, that afternoon. As I was coming home, swinging around to the Lava road, I met a fellow cutting across country toward the butte, coming from over this way. He rode up out of a hollow and crossed the trail in front of me. I didn't think anything of it at the time—in fact, I forgot all about him, till I got to working with Carroll. Now, after all I've heard about the layout over here, I believe he's

the one we want. He was riding an AJ horse, and that's Roper's brand, according to Mr. Saunders here. The AJ had been vented, but the new brand wasn't clear enough for me to tell what it was, just glancing at it that way. It was on the left shoulder. The horse was a chestnut sorrel, with a white nose and a white stocking on the left hind leg. When you get out, Cole, keep an eye open for that horse, and if you see him, let Mr. Saunders know as quick as you can, if I ain't around.

"I believe that was the murderer I saw that day. He could ride up over the end of the butte to our fence, tie his horse in the bushes, and come down the gully to the back of the house, and not a man on the ranch would know a thing about it—unless he was in the office," he added, with dropped voice.

AS Cole sat abstractedly watching the fall of the cards, he became aware of a growing temptation to ask Shorty if he knew of such a horse. There could be no harm in it. Cole felt fairly secure now in the part he was playing, and Shorty could not possibly fathom the reason for his interest. He might think Cole had seen and coveted the animal, or that he had seen the rider and was curious about him. He might think anything except the truth.

Cole shifted his position and sighed. Should he take a chance and ask Shorty? Saunders had warned him to be careful, to confide in no man until he was given permission. But this wasn't confiding, Cole reflected. It was simply asking a question which any range man might plausibly ask another. He would say that he had seen the horse in Burroback Valley, or down beyond the Sinks, toward the Harris place. But perhaps he had better wait a while. There was nothing to be gained now, even if Shorty could name the man for him; he would still be obliged to wait until Saunders came back.

So he took the matter to bed and slept on the question. He milled it over during a long and gloomy forenoon and decided that he would say nothing to Shorty about it until they were in the open, if they ever got out, which Cole was begin-

ning to doubt when the time dragged so intolerably. With that, he picked up a magazine and tried to interest himself in a story. But between his eyes and the page rode the mysterious horseman on the chestnut sorrel, and words held no meaning whatever.

"What's on your mind, Cole?" Shorty looked up from his endless game of solitaire. "You're as full of talk as a clam to-day."

"Oh, nothing." Cole flung the magazine against the wall and sat up, reaching for his smoking material. "You know this country pretty well, don't you, Shorty?"

"Why?" Shorty countered, an ace poised in his fingers, while he looked at Cole.

"Oh, nothing much, only I thought you might know who rides a chestnut sorrel horse with a white nose, white stocking on the left hind leg, vented AJ brand and another one blurred."

Shorty laid down the ace of clubs, picked up the deuce from one of the long rows before him, placed that upon the ace, releasing the trey of diamonds, which he placed on top of its deuce; then he looked the layout over carefully for other chances to build to his aces, glanced at the deck in his hand, licked his thumb, slipped off three cards, then three more, and got the trey of clubs for his deuce.

"What's that again?" he asked, glancing up at Cole. "A chestnut sorrel with white nose and——" He snapped a thumb and finger vexedly. "Oh, damn! I let the four of diamonds go by me; that's another one for old Sol. Gimme that description again, will yuh, Cole?" He swept the cards together and began to shuffle them idly, his eyes upon Cole's brooding face.

"No, I ain't sure," he said doubtfully when Cole had repeated the description. "When we make our get-away, though, I can prob'ly find out and let yuh know. What about it? Got your eye on that particular horse?"

"I'd sure like to know who rides him!"

"Oh! It's the man instead of the horse you want to know about the worst. Well, I'll try and let yuh know. Looks like you don't get any calls to-day. They musta

beat it outa town, all right." Shorty's voice carried a note of suppressed eagerness.

"I guess they did. Don't you remember seeing that horse over in this country, Shorty?"

"I dunno," replied Shorty. "What's his build and weight?"

"I don't know," Cole was obliged to confess, and Shorty gave a grunt and went back to his game.

HOURS dragged on. When it grew too dark for Shorty to play, he sat on the edge of his cot and smoked, just as Cole sat on the edge of his own cot and smoked; two silent, somber men weary of inaction and their own thoughts, lacking that perfect confidence which would have permitted unguarded conversation. Silence and brooding thought.

The light in the corridor snapped on, and Dick came whistling down past the empty cells on either side. Now he was looking in, their supper resting on one arm. Shorty got up and walked lazily forward, as Dick unlocked the door and pulled it open.

"Welcome as the flowers in May!" drawled Shorty, yawning and stretching his arms upward, as Dick came in.

Dick grinned, stooped a little, setting down his burden, and Shorty's right fist came down with stunning force against Dick's ear. The coffee tilted perilously, as Dick crumpled at the knees, but Shorty saved it from spilling more than a few spoonfuls. As the guard rolled over on the floor, Shorty bent and pulled the gun from its holster on Dick's belt.

"Hand me your handkerchief, Cole. I oughta blow the son-of-a-gun's brains out, but the sound might carry." Shorty's voice was cool and unhurried, as if he were vocally debating the wisdom of using a certain card. He stood up, looking at Cole. "Well, the way's open," he said quizzically. "You've been belly-achin' to git outa here, now come on!"

"I never wanted to go out that way, by half killing a man when he wasn't looking." Nevertheless Cole gave Shorty his big silk handkerchief and stood looking down at the limp and apparently lifeless Dick.

"You won't go out no other way, till you're let out," Shorty replied grimly. "Jail doors don't blow open with the wind, far as I ever heard." He was tying Dick's wrists together behind his back and including a leg of the stationary cot in the bond. Dick's own handkerchief served for a gag, and Dick's gun belt fitted very nicely around Shorty's middle. Now he hurriedly filled his pocket with bread, gulped down a few swallows of coffee, and looked at Cole.

"Well, if Saunders don't meet us walkin' out, we'll be in the clear before yuh know it," he said calmly. "Get your hat and coat, wherever they are, and come on. You don't need a gun; we're goin' among friends."

Cole hesitated, looking down at the unconscious man on the floor. A vivid recollection of that other terrible figure lying at his feet not so long ago turned him white and sick. The brutality of the thing repelled him and made him almost hate Shorty, who stood there in the door, waiting for him.

The feeling passed. There was work for him outside, and, as Shorty had said, the way was open. But he wanted a gun. Shorty did not know how terribly important it might be for Cole to have a weapon. He followed Shorty out of the cell and down the corridor, turned aside into the office and armed himself. A minute later the two walked boldly out of the front door, stopped to light cigarettes in the dusk—their eyes glancing this way and that along the street, as they did so—and went their way along the trail that led to the sheriff's stable. If they were observed, it was without suspicion, and if Shorty was recognized, no one questioned his right to be abroad. But at that hour the little town of Crater was eating its supper, and the street was nearly empty. Afterward, no one remembered even seeing them leave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CARROLL SPEAKS.

FOUR quiet-mannered, hard-faced men followed Ed Carroll down the steps of the midnight train from the East, when it stopped at Crater for water. One by

one, four sacked saddles followed the limp mail sack to the station platform. Up the track in the starlight the big engine gasped and drank thirstily for its climb over the mountains, and stared with its one brilliant eye down the track toward the stockyards. Down in the little town a dog barked in a shrill, tireless monotone, but otherwise the seat of Crater County's government gave no sign of life nor betrayed any interest whatever in through trains. The night operator came out with the train orders whipping in his fingers, distributed the thin sheets of paper to engineer and conductor, picked up the mail sack, and went in where it was warmer; for even in late summer the nights can be nippy in that high altitude, and the wind that crept down off High Trail was keen and searching.

"I guess Saunders didn't get my wire," Carroll remarked to the man nearest him and peered all up and down the platform. "We better go right on over, I guess, unless you boys'd rather go to the hotel. I guess that's what we better do—get four or five hours' sleep, anyway, and have a good long day before us to-morrow."

"What'll we do with our saddles?" one thin man perfunctorily inquired. "Leave 'em here, or take 'em with us?"

"Better take 'em along," another advised, as he selected one and shouldered it. "Me, I like to keep my ridin' gear right where I can get at it."

"Punchers coming in to work on round-up," the night operator mentally identified the group that straggled off down the street into town. "Wish I was one of them! This inside work—" He watched them enviously, for they walked in a glow of swift-moving adventure conjured in panoramas by his own longing. He saw them galloping far and free over the hills, or scurrying here and there in the valleys, "working" herds of cattle driven down from the high summer grazing grounds. He saw them laughing around camp fires, sleeping rolled in their blankets, their faces to the stars.

He saw them as they were not, but that is the way with men who carry the tang of romance in their blood. The

night operator had spent one summer on a cattle ranch and hurt his side so that he had to give up the life and go back to brass pounding, and a range hat and high-heeled boots would always spell round-ups to him.

The five whom he envied clumped into the hotel, where a dim light shone in the office. They did not talk of round-ups; they did not talk of anything but beds and early breakfasts, and when they trailed after the sleepy landlord to their rooms, they went wearily, with nothing whatever to say.

"Well, see yuh in the morning," came from Carroll, as he turned in a doorway.

"Sure! Call me if I don't show up," from the man who wanted his saddle handy.

If the others spoke at all, no one heard them. And yet—

The man who wanted his saddle was an ex-ranger from Texas, as was the other one, with black eyes and hair, who drawled in his speech. The short man, with a pudgy nose and small, pinched-in mouth, had a record as long as his arm in Montana, and the little fellow with face like a hawk was Carroll's star trailer and go-getter deputy. At least, Carroll called Frost his go-getter deputy. The night operator, who loafed up in the station and dreamed of round-ups, would have thrilled to his toes had he known who those nocturnal travelers in the high-heeled boots really were.

They rose at dawn and trailed Carroll silently to a restaurant, which catered to early birds like themselves, and they drank black coffee with more than a plenty of sugar, ate ham and eggs and hot biscuits and sirup and had nothing whatever to say. Having begun the day with plenty of fuel for their energies, which might be needed almost any time, they followed Carroll across the street to the county jail, where Bill Saunders slept in a meager room adjoining the office.

His eyes bloodshot from loss of sleep and riding in the wind, Bill Saunders stood in the middle of the office and stared in bovine calm from one to the other of his early visitors. Frost he knew. "Tex" Allen he had seen in a

courtroom. The other two were briefly introduced, and his eyes said that he had heard of them.

"Parrish is in bed yet, I guess," he volunteered in his rumbling voice, looking at Carroll. "Made a little trip yesterday and didn't get in till about two this morning. He's stopping over at the hotel. Want me to——"

"I'll go get him," the little hawk-faced man offered and was gone.

IF Saunders was curious, he was quiet. He had the air of waiting for court to open; but he didn't wait long, for Billy came, unwashed and uncombed and hitching up his belt, as he walked. He, too, was curious, but unlike Saunders he looked it.

"You didn't get my wire, Bill?"

Saunders shook his head.

"No matter. I didn't say anything, except that I was coming. Well, these men, Tex and Charley Couch, have been workin' on the case off and on for a year. I told you, Bill, I had men out. 'Frosty' and Nathe have been on it since I suspicioned Lawson was killed, and Parrish I deputized and sent up here to look after the kid, while we got ready to spring the trap." Carroll paused, apparently wanting to condense his information as much as possible, and he was finding it difficult, with such a wealth of interesting details in his mind.

"We've got the connection, all right, between Roper's gang and Lawson. Roper is just the local head over here—the real boss lives in Kansas City, and the officers back there are pullin' in the slack on him; so all we've got to clear up is our own end of it. Well, it's a jumbled-up mess of stolen stock shipped out with the C-Bar-L beef and other stock that Lawson had bought. All told, I guess they got into old Cole pretty deep before he caught on. After that, it seems they tried to blackmail him in a quiet kind of way. There was considerable arguin' back and forth, and it looks like old Cole had visitors in his office more'n once that the C Bar L didn't know anything about. But that's neither here nor there. What we're workin' on now is that last caller he had."

"You get him, yet?" Billy Parrish was showing impatience.

"We expect to get him. Dirk Tracey has been trailed to the Muleshoe and from there to Roper's place. A spy in camp comes in handy sometimes. We also," he added slowly, "know who it was you met that day, Billy, riding that AJ horse. We know his name, and we've got his description, and we know he's a Roper man. We came over to pick him up before he gets outa the country, and we came in a bunch, 'because we want the rest of the gang, too."

"Count me in," said Billy, and Carroll nodded.

"The way we've got it doped, this fellow didn't go over there expectin' to kill Lawson. If he had, he'd have been a little more careful not to meet anybody on the way, and he would have had a knife, most likely. No crook would be crazy enough to kill a ranch owner in his own house, with his men on the ranch liable to come in any minute, almost. He probably went over with some message from Roper, askin' for somethin', most likely. You know old Cole, Billy. Get him pushed just about so far, and he'd outtalk a government mule.

"Must have been something like that took place that night, and this fellow lost his temper. I figure that he struck Cole and knocked him down. Then, either he was scared of what old Cole would do when he got up, or the gang wanted him outa the way, anyhow, and he thought this was a good chance. He probably grabbed Lawson's gun and shot him in the mouth. He knew it would pass for suicide—or he had every reason in the world to think it would. Here was that mortgage foreclosed. It was the first thing any one would think of. Things had come to a show-down, it looks like.

"But the fellow slipped up on two points; he didn't know old Cole was left-handed, and he didn't have time to stop and figure out where the bullet would land. So we nailed the suicide idea right there, and when I got to prowlin' around I found out some other things. That fellow you met on the AJ horse, Billy—did you notice the size of his feet?"

"N-o, I don't believe I did, Ed."

"Well, I guess you wouldn't, just meeting him on horseback, that way. It don't matter. I've got the horse checked, and I know who owns him. First, I took particular notice of the tracks into the gully and on up to the fence. A tall man made 'em, by the length of his steps, and I bet I could pretty near guess the size of his boots, too."

"He over in this county, Ed?" Saunders had come to life and was watching Carroll's face unblinkingly.

"He's over in this county somewhere, or he should be. We know he left the Black Rim country the night of the murder and was riding this way, and that he belongs here. He oughta be here yet, because it's never got out that we know Lawson didn't commit suicide. He's a tall man, five foot ten, anyway. By the size of his tracks, I'd say he wears about a number five boot. Unless he's left the country—he might have got scared out, thinking the kid was on some kind of a clew—he ought to be easy to locate. Know anybody over here, Bill, named Shorty McGuire?"

"Uh-huh. What——"

"Nathe, here, heard something that led him to believe the man's name is Shorty McGuire. Is he tall and got little feet and——"

Sheriff Saunders got out of his chair, as if he had been stung.

"You don't need any possey to catch him, Ed. I don't know the horse, but Shorty's back here in a cell, servin' a sixty-day sentence for petty larceny."

"How long has he been in? Was he at large when Lawson was killed?"

"Uh-huh. No alibi there. I made the arrest on the sixteenth of June."

"Lawson was killed on the twelfth. He didn't know that Cole was over in this country, probably."

"Guess not. He was here in Crater, drinkin' and gamblin' and havin' a good time, and he stole a rifle and watch from the blacksmith down the road. Too drunk to get outa town with the stuff—picked him up in a saloon with the watch in his pocket. Cheap watch, and the rifle wasn't much account either, so sixty days is all he got. Used to ride for

Roper, but I don't know what he's been doing the last few months; never saw him around much till lately, when he got into trouble."

Billy Parrish swore a sudden oath and caught Saunders by the arm.

"He that fellow you've got in there with Cole?" Billy's voice was harsh with dismay.

"Lord, I ain't no mind reader. How was I to know? At the time Shorty was taken in, I didn't know Lawson was murdered." Saunders turned at the office door and faced them. "I don't know as I'd tell the kid, for a while yet," he said slowly. "I'll go get Shorty, and you can question him, Ed. If he's the one you——"

"He's the one, all right," Carroll snapped. "Nathe has checked his moves. I'm ready to make the arrest any time."

"Uh-huh," Saunders assented and started down the corridor. Billy Parrish followed him, wanting to see Cole. Carroll and his men stayed where they were, quietly waiting until they were needed; they did not waste their energies, those seasoned hunters of men.

But they did look up with some interest when Saunders came striding in, half dragging Dick, still bound and with the gag hanging around his neck.

"Guess you'll want your posse after all, Ed," said Saunders. "Shorty laid Dick out last night and got away. He must have found out something. Dick says it was Shorty that knocked him out, and Cole's gone with him!"

The four quiet men who had nothing to say rose and looked at big Ed Carroll, while they hitched up their belts. Now at last they were interested, for here was work for them to do, and they were ready to start.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ROPER RANCH.

COLE lifted his head and gazed long at the night sky, taking great, lingering breaths of the night air that felt as cool on his face as water drawn from a deep well in summer, and as refreshing after the stale air of indoors. Never had Venus, the evening star, looked so bright,

nor red Mars following close. He had almost forgotten how the Big Dipper looked, and the Milky Way he was sure had grown broader and longer since last he saw it. Freedom sang in his blood like old wine, and the shadowy heights of the mountains at his right were like brooding giants standing on guard to give him safe conduct through the night. Even the keen impatience of Eagle for a mad run along the sandy road thrilled him, made him want to whoop and swing his hat high over his head and go racing away down the valley.

But Shorty, riding rather grimly beside him, set the pace at an easy lope; so, however much Eagle might toss his head and rattle the bit in his teeth, Cole must hold him in. He had no idea how far they would have to ride that night; but after what happened to Dick in the cell, Cole thought that Shorty would ride until he was safe, especially since he had the sheriff's extra horse between his knees. Once Cole turned his head and looked at Shorty, and he decided that Shorty did not seem highly elated over his escape. Cole suspected that Shorty had made that reckless break for liberty not so much for his own sake as for Cole's.

In that, of course, Cole was right; though he did not dream of the sinister purpose behind Shorty's bold performance.

"We turn off here and take to open country," Shorty said, after they had ridden a mile or two beyond town. "Don't want to meet the sheriff comin' home, and this is the trail he'll probably take."

Cole did not so much mind meeting the sheriff, but he could not tell Shorty that. And, of course, there was Shorty to protect. Cole had to think of that, too. But, after this job was done, and the Roper gang was safe in jail, he hoped Saunders would be grateful enough to let Shorty down easy. Cole did not want to see him get into any trouble over this night's work; he had come to like Shorty, and he did not believe he was one of the gang or ever had been.

What Shorty thought on that long, silent ride, no man can say.

WHERE they went, or how many miles they rode, Cole never knew. Shorty took the lead, and Shorty knew the way. Cole's mind was taken up with other things—with the millions of stars that were like old friends from whom he had been long parted, and the pleasure of being in the saddle once more. But when the first intoxication of his sudden liberty had passed, Cole began to think more soberly of what lay before him, and what he should say and do when he came face to face with Roper and Pete.

Ed Carroll and Saunders had intrusted him with a very important bit of detective work, and he was anxious to make no blunder and to overlook no clew however slight. He wished that he dared confide in Shorty, who would probably be able to tell him a lot that he needed to know; but until he was absolutely certain of Shorty he must be careful. Carroll had tried hard to impress upon him the salient truth that silence seldom does any one any harm, but that careless speech has plunged nations into war before now; though that is not exactly the manner in which Carroll expressed himself. Cole was recalling that warning when Shorty spoke out of a long silence.

"That AJ sorrel—what was it you want to know about him?"

"Well, I'd like to know who owns him and rides him."

"S'posin' I know 'im—or think I do—s'posin' he's a friend of mine. Any reason why I oughta tell? It's nothing that's liable to git him into trouble, is it?"

Cole lied, but he waited too long before he could bring himself to it. He might as well have said yes instead of no, for all the conviction the denial carried.

"What do you want to know for, then?"

"Curiosity, I guess." It was a lame reply, but Cole could think of nothing better to say.

"Curiosity killed the cat," Shorty reminded him with slow irony.

"Well, I want to see him and have a talk with him, then." Cole felt as if he were being pushed into a corner. "He knows something I want to find out; or, at least, I was told that he does. If I could see him——"

"Who told yuh? That Black Rim deputy?" Shorty's face was turned toward him, but in the darkness Cole could not read its expression. "If you want to get anything outa me, old-timer, you might as well come clean. Was it that deputy?"

"Something he said, yes." Cole was forced to choose his words carefully now. "He thought I knew something I didn't know. I guess he thought he'd get a lot outa me that he didn't get. And while he was talking and beating around the bush, he mentioned this fellow on the AJ horse——"

"He did, did he?" Shorty commented softly. "What did he say, kid?"

"Not much. Just enough——"

"No, get to the point. Is he tryin' to locate the fellow?"

"I don't know. No, I guess not. He'd just met him, is all, somewhere that he thought I'd been. I wasn't there——"

"Where was that? Over in the Black Rim country? Over at the C Bar L, say?"

"What makes you think I meant over there? I never said——"

"It was C-Bar-L horses you stole, wasn't it? Or that he thinks you stole, we'll say. He's a Black Rim man—you said so, and Saunders said so. Why wouldn't I think it was over there he saw him?"

Cole shook his head in the darkness.

"Looks like you're the one that wants to find out something," he charged boldly. "If I was to start in and tell you all I know, you'd be as wise as I am, Shorty—and I might find myself in the middle of a damn bad fix. Maybe you know the man I want to locate and maybe you don't, but I sure ain't going to trade information, sight unseen. I've got too much at stake."

"Have it your own way—you will, anyhow," Shorty yielded indifferently. "We go single file from here on, and you want to stick close behind my horse, or you're liable to get lost."

This reminded Cole sharply of one other time not so long ago when he had followed a man in the dark, and the comparison struck him unpleasantly. So far as he could see in the starlight, they were

descending a rough slope into a dry river bed, but whether this was another part of the Sinks, he did not know, and he would not ask. He had not liked Shorty's tone and manner when the AJ horse was being discussed, and he began to feel that he had told too much, perhaps. After all, Shorty had been a Roper man, and the fellow Billy Parrish had met must have been another. Very likely Shorty had told the plain truth when he hinted that the man was a friend of his.

STILL, Cole did not suspect the truth, though he was put on guard and gave more attention to the route they were following. It did not help him much, for they merely crossed the river bed and climbed the farther bank, and after that they plunged into a labyrinth of gulches and rocky defiles quite as puzzling as had been that maze of rock ledges in the Sinks. They seemed to be climbing slowly, for now and then they rode out upon narrow ridges which gave Cole a vague impression of wide vistas and of mountains in the distance.

Nothing is so baffling perhaps as night riding in strange country. Cole was so certain that they had penetrated deeply into almost inaccessible country that he was astonished when dawn came and showed him wide, wooded pasture land all about him, and in the middle distance a snug cluster of stables and corrals set close up against a low ridge, with trees and a fair-sized pond and a grassy meadow just beyond. They were riding out from among low hills, he saw, when he looked back, but before him all was open and innocent looking and only moderately prosperous. More like the Harris ranch than the C Bar L, for instance; more like the place one would expect John Roper to own, if one heard and believed what he had said to Mother Harris.

"Well, here we are, kid," said Shorty and kicked the sheriff's horse into a lope. "Hope breakfast's ready, but I don't see no smoke. Maybe John's away somewhere." He turned his head and his mild blue eyes met Cole's questioning look with perfect frankness and the friendly air which had first won Cole to like him.

"What yuh so big-eyed about?" he asked. "You been here before, ain't yuh?"

"Not right to the ranch," Cole admitted. "Is this Roper's place?"

"Well," drawled Shorty, "I guess he pays taxes on it, anyway. Don't see any stir around. There's the dogs, though, now."

Deep-baying hounds of some powerful cross breed came charging down upon them, four great brutes that looked capable of dragging down a full-grown bull. Shorty forced his horse forward and rode to meet them, calling them by name and cursing them affectionately for the noise they made, and presently they were leaping playfully about him, paying no attention to Cole.

"You ride up here alone, and you wouldn't get very close," Shorty threw over his shoulder. "You'd have to shoot all the dogs first. But they're all right when they know yuh. Git down and pull your saddle. Ma Roper ain't up yet, I guess, and John and the boys are gone. But that's all right; we'll git our own breakfast."

While they were unsaddling at the corral nearest the stable, Cole stared furtively around him, feeling slightly crest-fallen, if the truth were told. It was not the kind of place he expected to see, in spite of Mother Harris' assurance that John Roper was an honest rancher, Saunders, too, had told him the same thing, and now the ranch itself gave evidence of the truth of it. On the surface, at least, Roper was as thrifty and hard-working and law-abiding a man as any in Idaho. Barring the dogs, there was nothing whatever out of the ordinary. There was even a Mrs. Roper to further emphasize the air of respectability of the home.

"That you, Shorty?" she called now from an upstairs window, as they were walking up to the kitchen. "Start a fire and put on the teakettle, and I'll be right down. John went to town, and I don't know where the boys are, but they'll be back some time to-day."

The head disappeared, and Cole followed Shorty into the summer kitchen, wondering whether he had made a fool

of himself, after all. He could not associate John Roper, as he believed him to be, with a gray-haired wife and a house that stood wide open to any chance rider who strayed that way.

He continued to wonder, all through the preparation of breakfast, which Shorty helped to cook. He sat watching the thin and energetic Ma Roper bestirring herself to set the table for three, while Shorty sliced cold boiled potatoes into one frying pan and broke fresh-laid eggs into another, where bacon was frying. Stealing and killing did not seem to jibe with this homely life. He wished Billy Parrish were there with him; he seemed to want Billy's opinion and advice more than he had ever wanted them before in his life.

If Ma Roper knew that Shorty had been in jail and should, by the mandate of the court, be there still, she did not mention the fact nor express any surprise nor curiosity over his sudden appearance. If she wondered who Cole was, and what was his business there, she kept her speculations to herself. She wanted to know all the gossip of Crater, however, and manifested a lively interest in the affairs of her neighbors. She seemed a garrulous old lady, and her bread was sour. Beyond that, Cole felt, when the meal was done, that he knew very little about Ma Roper, and that he cared less. She was not in the least like Mother Harris, at any rate. He carried away from the house with him the impression that she bore no very good will toward the world in general, and that she had no sympathy for the troubles of other folk, but how he got that impression he could not have told.

"We might as well bunk down and get some sleep," Shorty suggested when they had left the house. "The dogs'll likely wake us up if anybody comes. Stake yourself to a bed in there, Cole. This tent looks purty good to me. I'm goin' to bunk here."

Cole nodded and entered a cabin with three beds and laid himself down on the cleanest, suddenly realizing that he was tired and sleepy, and that he was glad Roper was not at home. He wanted to think things out before he went any

farther, because he could see that the task he had set himself would not be so simple, after all.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FROM A HAYSTACK.

HOURS after that, Cole awoke for the simple reason that a fly sat down upon his nose to whet its legs and wash its face—or whatever it is that flies do when they begin to prink and preen themselves. A swipe of his hand settled that performance, and the fly decided to adjourn to the open air. On its way out, it met Shorty who was up and had come quietly to the doorway to make certain observations of his own.

"Yuh 'sleep, Cole?" he asked cheerfully, seeing Cole lying there upon his side, with one arm thrown over his face.

Cole was not, but he expected to be in about three minutes, and he did not want the interval prolonged by Shorty or any one else, so he gave no sign whatever that he heard. The ruse was successful. In a minute he heard Shorty walking away, and, after a time of diminishing footsteps, he heard the screen door slam, so he knew that Shorty had gone up to the house.

Cole lay still for a moment longer, trying to woo back the dream which the fly had interrupted. Instead, it seemed to him that the walls of the jail were closing inexorably around him; he felt stifled, shut in away from the outside world, trapped, somehow; and the next thing he knew he was sitting up on the edge of the bed, feeling for the gun he had taken from the sheriff's room.

Full consciousness came with the feel of the checked and embossed grip of the weapon, but reassurance failed to come with it. He still felt as if he were in a trap, and that if he meant to get out before the jaws closed down upon him, with a final snap, he had better be quick about it. This was a hangover from his late captivity, no doubt, but the feeling was strong enough to send him to the window that looked down toward the stables.

No one was in sight anywhere. Eagle and the sheriff's horse dozed in the corral, and a white hen was walking up the

ridge of a haystack, just beyond. Cole watched her for a minute. Then he straddled out over the window sill and went down there. Just why he should keep the cabin between himself and the house he did not explain, but, since he had no definite suspicion of Shorty, he probably wanted merely to make sure of being left to himself. He was not sleepy, after all, he discovered, but he still wanted to be left alone so that he could think.

The haystack offered itself to him as a most attractive retreat and he made for it directly without even the dogs' interference. The white hen had settled herself in some deep nest on the peak and he did not even disturb her as he climbed up to where one end of the stack had been cut down to feed the stabled horses, when Roper and his men were at home. The platform thus left at the end farthest from the house was perhaps six feet from the ground, and it was in the shade, moreover. Cole sank into a pile of loose hay with a deep sigh of content. Here, at least, he need not be on his guard, nor need he fear interruption to his thoughts. But if he thought he was going to meditate deeply and wisely on the subject of John Roper, he was mistaken. For straightway he began to think of that day of pitching hay for Mother Harris; from there he began to think of Dorothy, and thinking of her he fell asleep again, while pleasantly engaged in painting mental pictures among the clouds that drifted lazily overhead. So the youth of him dominated once more over the man of him, and the meaning hidden deep in the eyes of a girl held his thoughts from dwelling just then upon the trail of a murderer.

To a casual mind it may seem that Cole Lawson did a great deal of eavesdropping at one time or another during this period of his life. But even in the range land men do talk together when they meet, and—perhaps because their work is such that they must do most of their talking in the open air and frequently amid the noise of herds—their voices gain a carrying quality not found among city men, who speak much within the immediate neighborhood of strangers.

At any rate, Cole had unthinkingly planted himself in an excellent position for eavesdropping, when Roper rode home and began to unsaddle his horse. This he did after Cole had spent an hour or so asleep in the hay.

SHORTY had evidently seen Roper's approach and came to meet him, or had been warned by the clamor of the dogs, for Cole heard voices and the barking of dogs almost simultaneously. Roper swore at the dogs, and they shut up at once. It was this which brought Cole to his senses and reminded him of the fact that he would be called upon now to use all the brains God had given him and all his courage, as well. But, before he made himself known to Roper, he wanted to hear what these two would have to say to each other when no one else was by. He listened deliberately.

Roper was naturally astonished to see Shorty, and Shorty made short work of the story of his escape. That part did not greatly interest Cole, though the next sentence did.

"I brought along the fellow that shot Steve," said Shorty. "No, listen, John. He's in the cabin poundin' his ear, and I want to talk to yuh. There's some funny work goin' on up there at Crater, and I hit off down here to put you wise."

"And put Saunders on your trail down here," Roper said nastily. "If he comes here after yuh, Shorty, I'll turn yuh over to him. I ain't goin' to get in bad with the sheriff's office for you or no one else."

"Well, now, maybe you'll change your mind about that, John, when I tell yuh. A C-Bar-L man come over to Crater day before yesterday, claimin' to be a deputy sheriff. Maybe he is. He come to claim them horses Cole's got, or did have——"

"I know all about that, and all the how and whyfor," Roper again interrupted. "Dirk's just come back from over there. Seems young Lawson had them horses stole from him. He's in Seattle——"

"Like hell he's in Seattle! This feller I got with me is him. I knew it, the minute that C-Bar-L man stepped up to the door and looked at him. Went off down the hall together, thick as thieves.

They're cookin' up something, John. They're wise."

"Wise to what?" Roper's tone was a challenge. "If they're wise to anything, I know who to thank for it, Shorty. You put your foot in it when you done what you done——"

"Hell! Blame *me*, will yuh?" Defiance and contempt vibrated in the voice of Shorty McGuire. "You sent me over there to shut old Lawson's mouth, and I *shut* it, damn yuh! Now, you——"

"You should have stayed right there in jail. It was the safest place in the country for yuh."

"Oh, was it? Not with that fellow I met that day, over here hobnobbin' with Saunders—and not with this damn kid bonin' me about the horse I rode over there. They're cookin' up somethin', I tell yuh."

"What?"

"That's what I aim to find out," said Shorty, with cold malevolence.

"Think this kid knows anything about it? Looks to me, Shorty, as if you kinda went off half cocked. Dirk read the letter young Lawson wrote back from Seattle, describin' this feller over here. Dirk knows the coast, and he said it's a dead cinch this feller stole young Lawson's horses and outfit and put off over here. If they sent a man over here after 'em, that only bears out what Dirk says. He read the letter, mind yuh, and the description. He knows what boat young Lawson was takin' north. You can ask him if yuh like, soon as he comes up from the Sinks. Bart had it all wrong about——"

"In that case," said Shorty grimly, "it's about time I come and put yuh-all wise. It's a frame-up, I tell yuh. Hell, I've been watchin' this kid, and I *know*. Why, he described my horse to the last hair in his tail. Dirk's a damn fool, that's all."

"If yuh mean that sorrel horse you got off *mê*, you've rode him considerable, Shorty. Black Rim ain't the only place you rode him, but that was one place, you damn fool, where you should 'ave rode a horse that wouldn't be spotted as yours, first thing. You got the jumps, looks like to me." Roper gave a laugh

that was in itself an affront to any self-respecting man. "We had this kid lined up wrong. He stole them horses off young Cole Lawson, I tell yuh. His showin' up at the Muleshoe was just a bad break, or else he aimed to let on like he was Lawson, an' he got cold feet afterward. Bart put me on the wrong trail. Now, here you come, like a damn fool, gettin' us all in bad with Saunders—or yuh would, if I'd let yuh. What you better do, Shorty, is go on back to jail and take the kid with yuh."

"Yes, I will—*not*! I tell yuh, he's Cole Lawson! Gimme half an hour with 'im, and I'll prove it to yuh."

This apparently impressed Roper, for there was a pause before he answered. Cole was afraid to look, lest he rattle the hay and betray his position, but he listened, holding his breath that he might not lose a word.

"How d'you expect to prove it, Shorty?" Roper asked at last.

"I'll string the damn traitor up by the thumbs and make him come clean," Shorty said, a hideous expectance in his tone. "What do yuh think I brought him along for? I couldn't go at him in jail, could I? I'll get it all out of him, or I'll skin him as I would a coyote."

"If he ain't young Lawson——" Roper was cautious, weighing all possibilities.

"If he ain't," Shorty impatiently pointed out, "nobody's goin' to miss him. A horse thief that's broke jail is better off dead, anyhow. If he is—and I know damn well he is—I'll kill the skunk for tryin' to put one over on me."

"You'll pull the roof down on your head, Shorty. There's times for that, and other times—like old Cole, now. You——"

"Yeah, I what?"

"You took a risk you wasn't justified in takin'. Dirk says there ain't a whisper of doubt; but there might 'ave been. Dirk says we're all in the clear over there, and we can just as well ferget it and go on about our own business. *You're* the one that's liable to——"

"Cut out the compliments, John. I'm the one that *knows*. And while we're on the subject, John, don't git the idea

that I'm goin' to give you a chance to bump *me* off. I thought that all over on the way down here. I don't trust you a single inch, if you want to know how I feel. But this is your funeral as much as it's mine, you want to remember. You goin' along to help me git the truth outa that kid, or ain't yuh?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

COLE DECIDES TO ACT.

YOU don't need any help! Put up your hands, both of you!" Suddenly exploding into a fury that startled even himself, Cole came off the stack and faced them, gun in hand and finger trembling on the trigger. "I'm Cole Lawson, all right, if that's what's worrying you, Shorty. You—you snake!"

This, because Shorty's hand had darted toward the gun hanging in its holster. Cole fired, and the hand jerked upward, scattering red drops that became a small stream.

"You, too, Roper. Get your hands up, or——"

Roper's hands went up, but he whistled, and the dogs came bounding down from the house, barking and yelping with what sounded to Cole like savage anticipation. Shorty was reaching for his gun with his left hand. Cole stopped that with grim completeness and snatched the gun from its holster, as the foremost dog came into sight.

"Call off your dogs, Roper, or I'll have to kill 'em," he yelled. "I don't want to, for they're more human than you are. Quick!"

Roper gave him one evil glance, looked at Shorty, who was staggering away with one shattered hand and a broken arm, and hesitated. Already the leader of the pack was standing ready, teeth bared and hair lifted on neck and shoulders, waiting to leap. A dog more or less—what did it matter? It would give him a chance——

"Git 'im, Wolf!" snarled Roper, and the dog sprang.

So did Cole, for that matter, and dodged the impact of the big brute's body, as he fired point-blank at Roper who already had his gun out. Roper

took two jerky steps backward and went down; the sheriff's guns were good ones, thought Cole, as he whirled to defend himself from the pack.

It was not pretty work, that. Cole loved dogs. But these were savage beasts, taught to kill when their master commanded, and now that master was down and frenziedly urging them on to their death, as he must have known; for it was Cole's life or the dogs'.

More than once he felt their hot breath in his face, as they leaped for his throat and fell back. More than once they bit into his clothes and tore away fragments of cloth, which they flung aside, and leaped again.

"You—you ought to be shot, yourself!" blazed Cole with tears of excitement and rage in his voice, when it was over, and Roper was left cursing impotently on the ground. "You could have stopped them! You——"

"For pity's sake, what *is* this—a slaughter yard? Why, Cole!" Mother Harris and Dorothy, having started for Crater that morning early, decided to stop at John Roper's ranch on the way to see if they could learn anything about Steve, and what he was doing. Perhaps, they reasoned, they might even be able to pick up a little information of use to Sheriff Saunders, who had told them a most amazing story about Cole.

They had driven up in the midst of the tumult of howling and barking and worrying, with men's voices shouting unintelligible curses, punctuated by the vicious crack of a gun. Just as soon as Dorothy could tie old Joe, who would not "stand," they had come running around the end of the stable to see what dreadful things were happening.

THEY beheld Cole standing threateningly beside Roper, who was lying on the ground and looking sick. Dogs seemed to be lying about promiscuously, and Cole's shirt was half torn off him, and his arms were bleeding, and his face was convulsed with rage and pain. He turned his head and stared at them, as if he had never seen them before in his life.

"Where's Shorty? See anything of

Shorty McGuire? I can't let *him* get away, the——"

"Why, are you thinking of killing him, too?" Dorothy had recovered her voice, while her mother was still gasping in speechless astonishment.

Her voice brought Cole to his senses. He started toward them, walking groggily, his gun hanging loosely in his hand and breathing faint wisps of smoke.

"Shorty—I've got to find Shorty——" He halted, looking dully around him and swaying a little as he stood. "He—he mustn't get to the rest——"

"Mustn't get to John Roper's men, you mean?" Dorothy was walking slowly toward him, her hands out, as if she feared he would fall, and she must catch him. "Some riders were coming down off the hill, as we drove up. I guess it's the AJ boys, all right."

"Then get back outa the way!" Cole straightened, looked around him, and, as if he had chosen his position, began to back toward the haystack. "Get away from here!" he exclaimed, waving the two women off. "There'll be bullets bouncin' around here when they come!"

"Oh, is that so? If that's the case, I guess I can bounce a few, myself! Come on, mom. You've got dad's gun, I know, 'cause I saw you slip it into your coat pocket. Billy, The Kid's going to need help, from the looks of things around here." Dorothy, walking wide of Roper and the dogs, planted herself beside Cole. "You certainly got yourself well chewed up, didn't you?" she observed, glancing hastily at him. "You look almost as if you'd been in a fight!"

"Dorothy, how can you pester the poor boy that way?" her mother sharply reproved her and ranged herself belligerently alongside Cole. "Here the poor boy's been fightin' for his very life, and you——"

"Shut up, mom! They're coming," was the unfilial retort, as hoofbeats were heard galloping up to the stable.

"You two beat it!" Cole implored. "This is going to be——"

"Oh, hush!" Dorothy hissed. "They won't shoot us if they can help it. What do you think they are, anyway?"

Cole did not say, for at that moment

Sheriff Saunders himself walked around the corner of the stable, followed closely by Billy Parrish. They stared, and Billy came on to Cole. Dorothy gave a hysterical little laugh. Mother Harris looked suddenly wilted and as if she were going to cry.

"You want to look out, Mr. Saunders," Cole cried, his voice showing the strain he had borne. "Shorty's somewhere—gone to stir up the gang, I guess. He can't shoot, for I put him on the bum; but he can walk, all right, and he'll have the gang here if he can find them."

"That's all right, kid," Saunders rumbled equably. "I want the gang here. It will save goin' after 'em."

"But——"

"Now, that's all right! I got men enough to take care of 'em; don't you worry a minute. Well, Mr. Roper, I guess you and Cole's been havin' a little trouble here. Where yuh seem to be hurt?"

As easily as that, the storm of killing hate subsided. The two women and Billy Parrish led Cole off to the well, where first aid could be most conveniently applied. He was terribly bitten on arms and legs, and Mother Harris had terrible visions of hydrophobia, which she would not have admitted for the world to Cole.

Ed Carroll and his men, Billy explained later on, were stationed where they could pick up Roper's men when they rode in, and some one had found Shorty half a mile down the trail to the Sinks and had brought him back before he could give any harmful warning to the rest.

"Cole better go right on up to Crater with us," Mother Harris declared, "and take the train to Salt Lake, where he can have these bites pasteurized. Don't you think so, Mr. Saunders?"

Saunders did, and so did Carroll and Billy, when they heard the plan. There was no knowing, they said, how long they might be delayed there waiting for Roper's men to come in, and Cole had better go on and have his wounds attended to before they gave him trouble.

Billy went along and drove the team, which gave Cole and Dorothy a chance

to get really acquainted in the back seat together; though Cole was not in the mood for much talk. Still, certain matters of interest to them both progressed very favorably, and they parted friends at the depot.

YOU may think that Cole returned to the Black Rim when his hurts were healed—or before—and resumed his place among those friends who had known him all his life. That was what Billy Parrish expected and blandly took for granted, especially when it developed that some money was left after the Lawson debts were paid from the sheriff's sale. But Cole had different plans, and at Crater he balked and would not take his horses and go on home with Billy.

"I've got some stuff out at the Harris place," Cole explained. "I'll have to go——"

"Aw, cut it out, Cole. Saunders had your stuff brought in here; you know darn well the women hauled it in the day you had your big setting with Roper and

his dogs. And your horses are here, and your saddle——"

"I've got a dog out there I'd hate to leave——"

"Aw, the world's full of dogs, Cole. You surely ain't going to be pestered with a dog? Anyway, there's an ornery yella curb setter that followed Saunders and me in when we brought the horses. Mrs. Harris said he was yours, so——"

"Well, Billy, I've got to go out there, anyway. I promised mommie I'd help her run the ranch. And if there's any money coming to me, Bill, right there's where it's going to be used. I've got my eye on a dandy piece of ground right on a creek——"

"Aw, come off!" Billy disgustedly implored. "You got your eye on the girl—that's what."

Cole's ears turned a sudden and vivid scarlet, but he stood his ground.

"Well, and who's business would that be?" he demanded truculently.

"Why, nobody's, Cole, and I wish yuh luck—only, don't lie to *me*, darn yuh!"

THE END.



WITHIN A MONTH

MAN is the eternal speculator. In the United States right now there are dozens of tourists, prospectors and miners with their hopeful eyes focused on a Western desert region, where two boys are said to have found a vein of gold.

The news leaked out somehow in Tonopah, Nevada, with the result that a hundred automobiles lined up, ready to dash toward the hidden fortune as soon as definite information was obtained. The town was hysterical; but the boys kept their secret. People followed them about, making offers, eavesdropping, and concocting no one knows how many wild plans to get the least hint of the rumored bonanza. Who says that all the romance has gone out of life? Why, only recently, there was a terrific stampede over in South Africa, when hundreds lined up for the wild rush to the alluvial fields at Granfontein in the Transvaal. At the starting point, the fortune hunters waited for days, eager to be the first in line when the mining commissioner should fire the pistol shot—the signal for the grand race. That affair is the great South African outdoor sport. In another part of the world, also very recently, man threw up his hat and hurried toward a possible fortune. A Crimean peasant unearthed ancient gold vases and other precious articles in some old Greek ruins near Kerch. When the news wafted around, so many excited peasants flocked to the scene that the authorities had to interfere. One of the objects found was a vase with a design showing Persephone returning from her sojourn in Hades. Gold, diamonds, classical antiques—all within one month. The tragedy—which all optimistically discount—is that only a pitiful few are lucky enough to profit; while the rest, bearing witness to that eternal human trait, subside to wait and hope for another hail from Opportunity.



“Star Light, Star Bright”

By Robert McBlair

Author of "Mr. Kelly's Corpus," "The Ace of Spades," Etc.

The theatrical world had shifted David Quigley into the wings. At times the old actor felt that he had been pushed into a corner and forgotten. Then out of the deep past there came to him the echo of an old refrain.

YOU got to do it faster'n 'at, Mr. Quigley," said Mr. Morris, cocking his cold cigar till it made an X with his nose.

"My idear is to kind of drawl it—make it funny," answered David Quigley apologetically.

"The lines is funny without you drawling 'em. I oughter know. I wrote 'em."

The booker looked around the large bare room, lighted by the afternoon sunshine of October, and waited for his laugh. He got it. Only four days more of rehearsals, and the act was still in bad shape. Mr. Morris, connected with an influential booking firm, had written this vaudeville turn at the tactful request of Messrs. Green & Green, Producers. If it was too bad to be booked, it would be a severe blow to Mr. Morris' pride as a creative artist. If he booked it anyhow, and it flopped, a blow would have been struck at his prestige as a booker. Rather

belatedly Mr. Morris had begun to see that from one direction or the other, he was due to be the recipient of a blow. As a result he had grown temperamental.

Yesterday the ingénue, after nearly two weeks of rehearsing, had calmly walked out on him to join a musical show. This had not improved his disposition. Messrs. Green & Green furnished the costumes and management in exchange for a percentage of the gross. They modestly left the responsibility of casting and directing to Mr. Morris. During the rehearsal period he could fire any one without notice; and jobs this year were scarce.

So Mr. Morris got his laugh. David Quigley, the juvenile lead, emerged from a coma of hunger-faintness, stroked his dyed black hair, and cackled thinly. The male quartet laughed chimingly in unison. Loudest was the deep laugh of the tall emaciated bass. Most striking was

a silvery peal from the squat and globular tenor. The ladies of the ensemble also laughed. There were four of them: two in pink bloomers, two in black; buxom in nondescript blouses. Two had economically removed their stockings. The other two danced in black stockings and high-heeled street shoes. Standing in line together between the divided quartet, they made an unconscious picture of what the young lady will not wear this season.

"Here's the way to jazz it up!" The shortness of Mr. Morris' figure was recompensed by the length of his arms and feet. He approached an imaginary orchestra pit with gestures suggestive of a side-wheel steamer.

"Ladies, gentlemen and congressmen. We are going to help you see America thirst—I mean, first. The next city will be Walla Walla. The man who discovered Walla Walla liked it so well he named it twice.' That's the way, Mr. Quigley." Mr. Morris returned to normalcy and adjusted his tie. "Now *you* do it, while I hold the watch. Last time you took nine minutes."

David Quigley swallowed dryly. In the opening of his collar his Adam's apple bobbed up and down above a lavender tie. He knew how to handle these lines and get a laugh. To do it Morris' way meant a frost. But David Quigley was a week behind on his room rent. He took out a lavender silk handkerchief, touched his lean, dark face, nonchalantly flecked a speck from one white spat, and carefully returned the handkerchief to his sleeve.

"All right, let's go!" said Morris impatiently.

"Ladies, gentlemen and congressmen——'" The lean figure in the wasp-waisted suit was ridiculous in the tempo of Morris' gestures. But the ladies and gentlemen of the ensemble did not laugh. Perhaps it was because of the perspiration upon Quigley's bony face. "Out where the belt is a little bit stronger, out where the shirt is a little bit longer—that's where the vest begins——'"

"At's good, you cut it to seven minutes. 'At'll do for you, Mr. Quigley. Where'n hell's 'at—— Oh, here she

is. You're late, girlie. 'At ain't no way to begin."

THEN David Quigley sank upon a chair. The tinkle of the tinny piano and Mr. Morris' thunders merged into the light-headed dreams which all day had seemed to be growing more real than reality. "Forty-three years old to-day!" Once again the words sang themselves in his ears. Once again the picture of Jean floated before his eyes. Exactly twenty-three years ago he had told her good-by, and still the pale oval of her face seemed to shine in the star light of that night. Still the silence of those twenty-three years lay upon him like a reproach.

Ambition, he recalled, had brought them together, and it was the rock upon which they had split. Her singing voice was then of the rarest and sweetest quality, a visiting singer had told them; it deserved to be trained; if David would marry her, support her, and send her to New York, the singer would teach her free. But David had received applause for his mimicry of a ribbon-counter clerk in the local amateur theater. He had attended the plays which visited their town and had compared himself with the actors on the stage. He had found the comparison favorable. So he had saved patiently till his twentieth birthday, and that night he went to see her. She had spied a star through the wistaria on the porch and was saying: "Star light, star bright, first star——" He interrupted her to tell her his plan.

"When I've made good, I'll send for you. Jean, you believe in me, don't you? You believe a great artist must be starved?"

"Yes, David."

"Then why do you keep on crying?"

"Oh, David! David!" And she had clung to him.

After twenty-three years, her face in the star light still came back to him whenever he was tired or lonely. And of late he had been very lonely. The tiny, dainty nose, the wide, wet eyes, like violets under water. It was a fountain at which he had contrived to feed his starving soul. He had never sent back for her. After the second year, he wrote her

that he was changing his name from David Sawyer so that she might not trace him. "The way things look at present, it seems the only fair thing to do."

He did not write to her again. A chorus man at twenty a week—some weeks—has no right to keep a girl in suspense. He stayed in the chorus six years, sometimes picking up extra dollars as a valet for a star. Lay-offs were frequent. He became acquainted with pie-and-coffee dinners; cardboard shoe soles; hard benches in the anterooms of harder agents and managers. He learned that the dented side of a tin bathtub will make a washboard for your only shirt; that coffee can be heated in a milk bottle over the gas jet, if you go about it slowly enough. He lost reckoning of the nights he had slept on a bench in the subway at the urge of some landlady owning a fourth-floor-back.

The seventh year he received a boost, and on Broadway, too. He became a waiter in the café scene, changing back to the chorus in the second act. His name and part had a separate line on the program! After this, with Broadway pride, he refused the chorus and asked for parts. Broadway rated him at his own valuation and gave them to him. Gradually, with the swift years, came an increased confidence and facility. At forty he achieved the part of juvenile lead in small-time vaudeville.

His long, dark face was not wrinkled deeply, his turquoise eyes retained their youth, and gray hair can be dyed. He wanted character parts, but vaudeville producers had learned the greater pulling power of women and song. He made friends with orchestra conductors, drawn to them by some affinity of association between music and his memory of Jean. Through their kindness in repeating his music, he had received a curtain call at Schenectady, at New Haven, and in the Bronx. As yet his applause had never "stopped the show." That was his ambition. He kept in his inside pocket a frayed envelope containing seven clippings, wherein his work had been singled out for particular mention. One said his voice was "pleasing;" another spoke of "typical vaudeville cracks delivered

cheerfully by the persistent monologist," a third referred to him as having "an inconspicuous, but also fortunately an inoffensive, personality."

Times lately had been hard. David Quigley had been on the verge of the chorus again, when this offer of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week from Green & Green had fallen like manna from heaven. The landlady owning his fourth-floor-back had consented to postpone her subway suggestions when he showed her the contract, salary to begin after rehearsals. He was eating, sometimes, on the bounty of acquaintances who anticipated reciprocation as soon as he got his check. Forty-three years old to-day—and lonely.

SUDDENLY David Quigley was aroused from his musings by a voice. It struck through the tirade of direction addressed by Mr. Morris to the new ingénue; it rang like a bell above the jangle of the piano. David Quigley felt the blood leave his face.

It seemed for a second that it was Jean of the star light, twenty-three years ago. The flesh crept coldly on his spine. He had noticed the last day or two that in place of the gnawing of hunger had come a queer sense of unreality, a dreamy feeling of floating on air. He was suddenly afraid. To know that he was dreaming, and yet to feel that here was Jean again. Eighteen years old when he left her that night—and not a day older to-day. The unmistakable freshness and slenderness of youth. David Quigley stroked his dyed black hair to quiet the prickles in his scalp. She was singing. Small red mouth arched open; wide, smoke-lashed eyes, like violets under water; ripple of smoky hair pressed close to the little head. The slender white throat, the narrow shoulders beneath the filmy gray blouse, the narrow hands clasped against the pleated blue-silk skirt. The small-boned ankle, the slim arching foot. And the voice. Untroubled purity. Coloratura. "We have heard God strike on a golden gong." He had read that somewhere.

She was coming toward him. She had stopped singing and, after a word with

Mr. Morris, had turned in his direction. David Quigley was cold with fear.

"You are the lead, aren't you?" she asked softly. She sat down beside him. "How did I do? Look! The director wants you."

David Quigley became aware that Mr. Morris stood at the door, as if reëntering the room, and that the booker had been shouting at him. He rose and followed the man out of the door and down the narrow hall to the offices of Green & Green. The fat figure of Mr. Green, Sr., seated behind the battered oak desk, was like a shape in a dream. And then the dream turned to reality.

"Mr. Quigley," said Mr. Green, "we gotta talk business."

David Quigley saw the face of his landlady, then the unfriendly eyes of the man from whom he had borrowed a dollar that morning. He swallowed dryly.

"Mr. Morris and I been talking. The way this act was wrote first, you understand me, they was just one lead—a girl, you understand me, and we dresses her up like one of these people what carries a trumpet."

"A herald," interpolated Mr. Morris.

"A herald or a tribune, it don't make no difference to what I am saying," Mr. Green retorted. "We dresses her like I says, and she sings the patter stuff what you've been doing. We got the music for it, you understand me, Mr. Quigley. Now Morris he says this here new girl can do that singing good."

Mr. Green scratched a match and pressed the sputtering sulphur against the stub of his cold cigar.

"We can get this here girl for fifty a week, and she's got legs. You got legs, too, you understand me, Mr. Quigley, but for all a vaudeville audience wants of legs on a man, Mr. Quigley, he might just the same roll about on wheels already."

David Quigley mopped his face with an effort at nonchalance and returned the lavender handkerchief to his sleeve. He produced a worn and grimy envelope from an inside pocket of the maroon wasp-waisted coat.

"I don't want to see no clippings, Mr. Quigley. I like you nice for our character parts, but for what we got right

here, I tell you what I got on my mind. Your contract calls for a hundred twenty-five, and Mr. Morris says the girl can do as good for fifty. Now, I don't mean no insult to Morris, but I ain't seen this girl on the stage, and if she does do good, she'll be wanting a raise or to leave us, anyway. And I want to keep you with us; this ain't the only ack we going to put out. What I mean, Mr. Quigley, in this ack we are going to have only one lead, either you or the girl, and a smaller ack, you understand me? And if you will come down to seventy-five a week, we'll sign up, and Morris can write you a couple extra speeches for where the girl used to be."

"Might probably he would want to think it over," suggested Mr. Morris.

"Sure," said Mr. Green. "He can think till rehearsal to-night. And either way he decides, Morris, it don't make no difference to me. I was listening to that girl sing. I don't mean to say nothing against the girl, you understand me, Morris, but I think she's got temperaments. I think she could play the part good."

QUIGLEY left the office with shaking legs. Alone in the chilly hall he experienced a sudden elation. They would keep him on! His public would see him again. Managers would hear of him. The rehearsal room was empty. He picked up his gray hat and smoothed the green rooster feather that curved natively above the black silk band, and put the hat on at a rakishly triumphant angle. The brown-checked overcoat was frayed at the elbows, so he threw it over his arm. At the door, thin chest expanded, he turned with a sweeping gesture to the silent benches and unplastered walls.

"Gentlemen," he predicted, "a great artist must be starred!" And with a huge roaring of soundless applause in his ears, he shut the door and went swaggering down the stairs to the slanting autumn sunshine of the street.

"Mr. Quigley"—he had forgotten the girl—"is there a cheap place to eat near here?"

The edge of her brown-fur collar was worn to a dingy gray. He lost himself for a moment in the unexpected depth

and blueness of her eyes. "I was going to eat," he volunteered. "I'll take you to a place around the corner."

On the stool beside her at the marble lunch counter he nodded an agreement to sandwiches and coffee. He tried to conquer the feeling that he was floating on air. He knew that he should eat, yet the sandwich was sickening.

"I'm awfully glad you let me come with you." Her round face was turned up to him confidently beneath the small tan hat. "This is my very first part, Mr. Quigley. Do you mind if I ask you how you think I did?"

"Your first time with an act?" He cleared his throat.

"I was in the chorus for over six months, but that doesn't count. You see, Mr. Quigley, I sang for the head of a big music school when I came to New York, and he says I have a remarkable coloratura." The words, the tone of her voice, reverberated with the echo of a dream which his giddy brain couldn't recall. "I am sure if I ever get started I can make good. You take a friend of mother's, for example. He was just a country boy. Yet he came to New York and became a great artist."

"What was his name?" asked Quigley suddenly.

"It's funny, but I don't know. Mother would never tell me. But I believe it was half to try and see him she moved to New York last year. When I accused her of it, she laughed. Said she came here to make me a star. She always said: 'Remember, you've got the voice; you've got the talent. And the great artist must be starred.'"

David Quigley's hand was unsteady, as he lifted the chipped white mug and supped noisily of the steaming coffee.

"She wouldn't tell you his name?"

"She used to laugh and say I'd know him when I saw him. A slender man of much distinction, she said. She said his eyes would be turquoise blue and very stunning against his fine dark face. Do you know a great actor like that? She said he would know me if ever I told him my name."

David Quigley bent his head to look into the bottom of the empty mug.

"What *is* your name?" he asked.

"I took mother's maiden name. Father drank a great deal and finally went off and left us. Mother said she could run a boarding house as well in New York as anywhere else, and it would give me a chance. The only thing we could find was on Staten Island. Do you know that red house by the third station, just beyond the little graveyard? We opened it up. And when I went into the chorus I called myself Jean Aubrey."

The mug clattered against the marble counter as Quigley put it down.

"I suppose you live with your mother over in Staten Island?" he asked at length.

"No. I have a room on Fifty-sixth Street—West. You see, mother—well, she died not long ago."

There was quite a long silence.

"Tell me," he asked her presently, "are you fixed all right?"

"That's why I wanted to ask you how I was doing, Mr. Quigley. If they keep me in the act, I can even save a little for voice lessons. And, oh, I *know* I'll make good!"

"But what if they give you the gate?"

She relaxed her slim white hands, palms upward, in the pleated blue-silk lap.

"I don't know, Mr. Quigley. I'll have to do something. I can get a job modeling. But that means standing up, showing dresses all day long, too tired to practice at night. And there's a boy wants to marry me. I—I like him enough, but he drinks a lot, and I'm afraid it would be just like mother. She had a voice, you know, and——"

"Let's get out of here," suggested David Quigley. He took out the borrowed dollar and paid their checks with a flourish.

"I know I've bored you, Mr. Quigley. You didn't *touch* your sandwich. And you didn't tell me what you think of my work."

"I wasn't watching you at rehearsal," answered David Quigley, as they passed into the gathering dusk. He doffed his hat to her in a wide elaborate sweep. "I'll watch you to-night, though. Nine o'clock. Don't be late!"

Gray hat jauntily askew, maroon suit buttoned nobbily tight at the waist, coat over arm, David Quigley strolled over toward Broadway.

"Queer!" he muttered; and yet he knew it wasn't queer. If Jean's daughter had become a trouper, it wasn't strange that they should meet. It was almost inevitable. The trickle of players, experienced or new, must flow through the narrow channel of Broadway managers and agents, like water through the neck of a bottle, before it can reach the public. If the world itself is small, the world of vaudeville managers' offices is smaller. "It's queer, though; I guess because life itself is queer."

HE stopped and looked up and down the Great White Way. Already winking electric signs were etching their fiery messages upon the murky Indian-summer dusk. The names of theatrical stars were fixed in bright white lights which hurt the eyes. Crowds of men and women were surging dinnerward, with an irresistible feverishness that brooked no leisure. Squawking motors fought each other for precedence, like armored beetles; the air was heavy with their fumes. This was Broadway. This was the home of stars. He looked up to the heavens. The light of the myriad electric lamps was reflected back by the dense gray air. He could not see the sky.

A thought was trying to form itself, as David Quigley crossed with the crowd at the policeman's whistle and made a jostling way toward Times Square. It had something to do with stars, something to do with Jean. It evaded him, as he drifted without conscious purpose down the stairs with the subway crush. He had not caught it when he emerged at length to the street again and strolled with the crowd onto the Staten Island ferry. The night had grown cool. He put on the frayed overcoat and stood in the shadow on the front deck. He felt as if swept along by this formless thought that was trying to come alive within him. The huge throbbing boat seemed to be rushing him in the same direction. The salt air was damp and pleasant. The crowd buoyed him to the train where he

found a seat and watched the dim trees and poles and houses go swirling past. At the third stop he got up and left the car.

He found himself on a small wooden platform against the side of a hill. Across the track the darkness of the low, flat ground was interrupted at intervals by the oblong of a lighted window. Behind him three scattered rooftops showed indistinctly beneath a starlit sky. He followed a winding flight of wooden steps and a path that led up the hill to a grassy plateau. The night was quiet and dark. Off to the left bulked the square of an unlighted dwelling. David Quigley stepped gingerly through the tall damp grass till he came to an iron fence. He followed the line of cold, wet spikes to a gate which hung inward on half a hinge. The grass within the graveyard was shorter and not so damp. He clamped the gray hat tighter on his head and progressed in the faint star light between the glimmer of stones. It did not surprise him to come directly to a headstone whiter than the rest. He struck a match. The chiseled inscription leaped at him out of the night:

Jean Aubrey Fulsom

Born June 20, 1884—Died April 21, 1925.

The match expired in the grass, with a little hiss. Darkness closed in like a vise. Something within David Quigley seemed to begin to break up. He gripped his hands together for strength, but his legs grew weak, and he sank to his knees by the grave.

After a while his breath came easier. The pressure of the darkness was somewhat lifted from his chest. His throat no longer ached. He removed his hat, mopped his cold brow, smoothed the curling rooster feather, and returned the hat to his head.

On the grassy knoll the blended sounds of the city were merely a drifting murmur; the dark intervening water, a bottomless gulf. He saw at whites in the city a flutter of lights, as of entangled stars trying to escape to the sky. The beams of Broadway had dwindled to a vague, pale smutch along the murkiness of the autumn night.

David Quigley lifted his eyes. It had

been a long time since he had looked at the stars. A phrase from childhood floated by: ". . . wish I may, wish I might, wish my wish come true to-night." The larger planets winked at him solemnly. He was surprised at the length and width of the Milky Way.

"That's the Broadway of heaven!" he thought and experienced an unexpected lightness in his breast. It was as if the formless thought had come alive within him and was lifting him on its wings.

He sat there on his heels, looking up at the sky. Gradually the thought he had been seeking began to come clearer in his mind. The stars of the theater, the stars of Broadway—maybe these were only small-time stars. What if there was a bigger stage, a bigger Great White Way? Actors became stars on Broadway because they mimicked human affairs. But what if there was a more important rôle? This was what he had never seen before—there was a rôle in the play of Life. Every one at birth must join the cast. Some had a long run, some a short.

He had never been one for church-going or religion. "It stands to reason, though," he argued, "a fellow who plays his part good is going to be discovered. And it all don't end down here. Everybody knows it all don't end down here. Sounds kind of foolish, but I bet the way people play their parts—I mean, maybe that's why some of the stars up there are little and some are big." His giddiness was returning, but he felt a subtle confidence in this new idea. It seemed something he had known deep within himself all along. "That little star, way over yonder, is a one-night stand in the sticks. Perhaps that bigger one nearer is on the subway circuit. And that crowded bunch that crosses the sky, with a kind of light about it—that's the real big time, all right. Yep, I bet that's Broadway up there."

FROM somewhere in the night he heard the regular strokes of a bell. Nine. The rehearsal was at nine. He rose stiffly, rubbing the dampness out of his knees. He took a farewell look at the heavens. A pure white star, alone and apart, held his attention. It seemed to

shine down upon him with some of the certainty and patience of love. Presently he raised the worn velvet collar about his ears, adjusted his hat at a resolute angle, and descended the path and steps to the station, just in time for his train. On the train and the ferry, in the subway, he sat hunched in a seat, hat tilted over the slit of his turquoise eyes. He swung off the old brown overcoat, as he went up the stairs to Green & Green's and entered the rehearsal room, where the quartet and the ladies of the ensemble were gathered idly around the piano. No sign of Mr. Morris and the girl.

"Oh, Mr. Quigley, they're looking for you in the front office."

He closed the door of the rehearsal room and walked down the hall. Hearing voices in the front office, he pushed open the door. Mr. Green lolled at his desk behind a fog of oily smoke. Mr. Morris was seated beside him. The girl stood against the wall, her slim hands gripped together.

"Nine o'clock rehearsal!" cried Mr. Morris. "He shows up at a quarter to ten. We should 'a' been up at the Colonial, Mr. Green, for a hour."

"Keep your shirt on," Mr. Green remonstrated. "Mr. Quigley—he's been thinking, and when a actor's thinking, you understand me, Mr. Morris, it ain't like a business man thinking, or even like you and me. A actor takes a lot of time to do his thinking, Mr. Morris, and even then he don't get nowhere."

"Mr. Green, suppose you and me discuss this matter in private." David Quigley doffed his hat, smoothed his dyed black hair, and glanced at Mr. Morris and the girl, with a plain invitation for them to depart.

"Now looka here, Mr. Quigley. Morris has been a-fretting to get to the Colonial and rehearse with this here girl. He thinks the girl is a knock-out, Mr. Quigley, and maybe she is, Mr. Quigley, but like I was saying, maybe she is, and maybe she ain't. And I been telling Morris: 'You wait a minute, Morris, for Mr. Quigley. He'll tell us if ye keep him or keep the girl. It is just a matter for yes or no, and it don't take no longer than that.'"

"*But, Mr. Green!*" David interrupted with dignity.

"*They ain't no 'buts!'*" Mr. Green sat up and struck the desk, his plump hawk face unexpectedly pink. "I been treating you like the Prince of Wales already, Mr. Quigley—holding up rehearsals and fighting with Morris, like we was cats and dogs, instead of next to the same as partners already. And all I ask you now is a yes or a no."

THE unforgiving face of his landlady floated before Quigley's eyes; he met the unfriendly glance of the acquaintance who had loaned him a dollar. Forty-three years old to-day—alone in the world. He swallowed dryly and looked at the girl, who was standing motionless against the wall. Her eyes were scared. Large blue eyes, mirroring each a point of light—a star.

"Really, gentlemen, you amuse me!" David Quigley's speech, abruptly and surprisingly, had taken on the accent of Oxford and Downing Street. He flicked a speck of dust from a spat and returned the lavender handkerchief to his sleeve. "I consent to assist you at a ridiculous salary, and then you endeavor to lower it!" His cackle was one of obvious enjoyment. Mr. Morris glanced uneasily at Mr. Green, as if wondering whether they were making a mistake in letting this personage go. "Why," Quigley laughed, "those who know me would consider it simply absurd!"

The small-time actor was straighter and taller. A slender man of no little distinction; eyes of turquoise blue, very striking against the lean dark face. David Quigley caught the girl's intent look. His manner grew in authority.

"No, gentlemen, I did not come here to-night for business. You have there," he waved at the girl, "a pearl without price. I have come to advise you to keep her as long as you can." There was neither doubt nor bitterness in David Quigley's heart. "As for me, gentlemen," the gray hat came off in a gesture of triumph, "there is a bigger stage!"

Mr. Green turned upon the booker. "What I been telling you, Morris?" he cried.

"Is it we have lost him yet, when he is here yet?" Mr. Morris retorted defensively. "Who was it must save on expenses? I ask you that! Who was it wanted to bluff him?"

"Put on your hat, Mr. Quigley, and make yourself at home." Mr. Green's fatness became oily with friendship. "What I been saying to you about that seventy-five dollars, you understand me, we'll just forget about that. We got a contrack at a hundred twenty-five, me and you, Mr. Quigley, and you and me lives up to your contracks."

"Mr. Green," replied David Quigley calmly, "I will not let myself be used in the place of this young lady. Besides, my gifts and future point to character parts."

Mr. Green rose and massaged Mr. Quigley's arm.

"Now you listen, Mr. Quigley, to a man who is your friend. We give the girl a contrack, you understand me? With her voice, after this run, I don't know if we can pay high enough to keep her. But, Mr. Quigley, I got a character part *you* will like it nice."

In the manager's eye shone the creative fire.

"It's a old-soldier part, Mr. Quigley. He gives up his life for his friend, you understand me? When you was talking then, I says to myself, I says: 'There's something about him that's just like that old man ought to be.' You know what I mean? It's a sort of something. Morris, I tell you, he will stop the show! Here's a twenty-dollar bill, cash down in hand paid, Mr. Quigley, which shows you I mean every word. What time is rehearsal for that soldier ack, Morris?"

"Four o'clock to-morrow for Mr. Quigley. No use him coming no sooner and having to stand around."

David Quigley agreed to this with a lordly nod. But, as he strolled from the room, the sense of victory was swamped by a surge of the old loneliness. In the hall he heard his name called and turned. It was the girl, running after him.

"Oh, Mr. Quigley!" Tears rimmed the smoke-lashed blue eyes. "How can I ever thank you!"

"Don't try to." He was heartened by

her friendly thanks. "I just did it because——" He stopped. Why had he done it? He didn't know. "I guess there wasn't any reason. I guess I just must have got my cue from somewhere. I mean, I guess those lines were in my part."

"I think you are wonderful!" She had laid her slim hand upon his arm. "Mr. Quigley, don't let's lose track of each other. I need your friendship, and maybe you—— Can't we have dinner together sometimes?"

"Surely, child!" Jean's child. His own child, he felt. "I can coach you in that part. I'll pick you up here to-morrow at six."

"Oh, will you, Mr. Quigley!"

Her face was alight. He saw her need

of his friendship. As he turned to go down the stairs, instead of lonely, he felt suddenly powerful and brave. It was almost as if something big and outside of himself had found him and was sweeping him along. A phrase was running through his head, and he reached the sidewalk:

Star light, star bright,
First star I've seen to-night,
Wish I may, wish I might——

He stopped and looked up. The sky was blurred by the reflection of the myriad city lights. But between the dark silhouette of two chimney pots he discovered a single white star, and it seemed to smile down upon him with all of the happiness and certainty of love.



AN AIRPLANE COMES TO SILVERTON

WHILE all the world watches for the latest spectacular performance of the airplane, we are apt to lose sight of some of its less astounding, but more practical achievements in our midst. Here is a case in point. Last March the people of Silverton, Colorado, were cut off from the outside world for four weeks. Into this snowbound village up in the Rockies, no letters, no papers, no telegrams, and no visitors had come for a month. We who live in the midst of a world that has been reduced almost to the size of a single city by the incredible means of modern communication, so that what takes place in China in one day may be known in the whole civilized world within forty-eight hours, can scarcely realize the situation of complete isolation, which overtakes these Rocky Mountain communities when snow shuts them in.

Silverton was in no dire need, but Silverton made a joyful noise when the town's siren announced the news that a big observation plane was hovering in the sky, just over their heads. More than a thousand residents had already sighted the plane, and the rest of the town quickly gathered to welcome the visitors. With several feet of snow covering the baseball diamond, there was no opportunity to land, but the cargo of the big ship was dropped into a snowbank.

The flight was made by members of the flying squadron of the Colorado National Guard for experimental purposes. This was an historical occasion for the southwestern section of Colorado, because it established certain findings for future air expeditions to the mountains under similar conditions, in an emergency. This plane, piloted by Lieutenant Dan Kearns, was the first airship to cross the Continental Divide at Monarch Pass, and this feat was accomplished at a time when the pass was choked with winter snow. Many similar attempts in the past had failed.



The Pearl that Came Home

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Point of a Thousand Spears," Etc.

"For Tragedy in her serious or comic guise, search the history of gems."
An illustration of that lies in this story of a pearl which caused trouble wherever it went—among royalty and rabble, from the China Sea to Europe.

THE other day in London the Southern Star, one of the largest and certainly the most beautiful of the world's diamonds, was put up for auction and "failed to realize any price." I forget what the bidding went to, nor does the amount matter beyond the statement that it was absurdly small.

The stone was too big—too big to be worn in an ordinary way. Big diamonds are out of fashion, and this everlasting crystal, holding in it the beauty and soul of sunrise, was turned down.

This is not a treatise on jewelry, else, leaving the Southern Star aside, I would quote many instances of lovely gems neglected, left in obscurity by taste, and only picked up at the dictates of fashion or vice versa. The black pearl, that was worth little till the Empress Eugenie made it sought after, the drop pearl that was worth much, till women gave up wearing drop earrings, the opal that went

out of favor less on account of superstition than fad; a list as long as the list of poets, painters, writers and sculptors, the intrinsic beauty of whose work was worth nothing till revealed by the eyes of some critic-seer.

THE Sulu archipelago, lying to the north of Borneo, contains over a hundred small islands, and the most beautiful pearls in the world have come from here. There is something in the water of the tropic seas that lends color to the coral and special beauty to the pearl, and of all the seas, the Sea of Sulu is most highly charged with this dynamic something that finds expression in beauty.

It was in 1882, when the Sultan of Sulu was fighting the Spaniards, the same sultan who sold his rights in the great bird-nest caves to the North Borneo Company, that Fleming, who had got hold of an old proa and the service of a Sulu

man, whose name sounded like Nakardike, was fishing for pearls—illicitly. He had come in through the southern Sibutu passage and worked up as far as Cagayan Sulu, and it was amid the tiny islets north of here and in view of the palms of Cagayan that he was doing his fishing.

Now, if you will look at the charts or at any large map, you will see that Sulu waters are almost as much inclosed as Tidal Basin. Five-hundred miles by five hundred miles, they are hedged from the south China Sea by Palawan, from the Celebes Sea by Sibuguey and all the islands to Tawi-Tawi, from the Pacific by the Philippines—a vast blue basin, where the shark shared kingdom with an emperor who impaled men for pearling without a permit. These facts did not in the least disturb Fleming in his fishing.

WAR proas might break the horizon any moment, or a boat of Spaniards come along, men worse than the men of Sulu. It did not matter; it was all in the day's work. No law ran in these seas to save a lawless man from extreme punishment. It did not matter, for only in the lawless seas could Fleming do his job, which was plunder in all its forms, from opium smuggling to barratry. Broken in his last deal with the customs, he had come down to the Celebes and with the profit of a lucky gamble at Mendao bought the fishing proa and provisions for three men for four months; also, the services of Nakardike and a Malay boy, Achmat.

A week ago, here, within sight of Cagayan, they had struck oyster ground and coach-whip fucus in six-fathom water, taking in six days three hundred pair of shells and ten pearls; six of the pearls were almost worthless, the others, at the prices ruling in those days, varying in value from five to twenty pounds apiece.

This evening, an hour before sunset, Fleming came on the great find.

Opening the last oyster of the take, a thing nearly as big as a soup plate, he saw a bulge on the flesh near the hinge of the shell; dividing the muscle, he squeezed gently and, like a great white bubble, out came a pearl. It was enormous—big as a pigeon's egg nearly,

weighing, maybe, a hundred grains and absolutely round, luminous, and perfect.

Holding it in the palm of his wet and dirty hand, Fleming looked at it. Behind him Nakardike, naked as the new moon and dripping from his last dive, stood gazing down at it; Achmat, squatting on the deck near by, gazed, too, and at the kriss which Nakardike had picked up from the deck, where lay his loin cloth and betel box.

A passing gull cried out at them, the only sound breaking the silence of that sea, stretching in the sunset toward the palms of Cagayan and the Sibutu passage.

Here was all Fleming wanted. He was up in pearls.

He had gained his knowledge from Chi Loo, the opium middleman, who dealt in pearls as well as opium, and who dwelt in Hankow. It was Chi Loo who had given him the tip about Sulu waters. This thing would be worth, maybe, five thousand pounds in the open market. But, as Fleming looked at it, after the first realization of its value, he did not see it—or only as the nucleus of a crowded picture, wherein figured Chi Loo, to whom he would offer it for sale, the bars of Hankow and Formosa, where he would cut a dash—games, champagne and dancing.

Nakardike, looking down, saw the Sultan of Sulu, who impaled men for illicit pearling. Saw also a house on stilts, near the Itang River, where he could live in comfort with a brown wife and unlimited credit at the traders' station; saw, also, that the moment had come.

Unknown to Fleming stood the terrible fact that this expedition, though paid for by him, was entirely Nakardike's.

Nakardike was not the person to risk the anger of the sultan for a few dollars—a month's wages. He had come with a cut-and-dried plan to be put in operation directly the pearl takings were worth the trouble of seizing, and not a moment later, seeing the danger of lingering in these prohibited waters. The moment had come, and the blow of the kriss that nearly severed Fleming's head left nothing to be desired in the way of vigor and directness.

Nakardike seized the pearl, pouched it, and helped Achmat to throw the body overboard.

NOW, the Spaniards at that time had several gunboats lying by their fortified settlement, Jalo, and the smallest of these, the *Seville*, a hundred-ton tin pot, with a beam engine and a swivel gun, steering eight knots and captained by the gay young spark, Lieutenant Alvarez, was cruising one fine morning between Lapan Island and Cape Sandakan, when the lookout sighted a proa.

Alvarez was down below playing the guitar and smoking. He came on deck. The fools on the proa had altered their course, which was as good as saying "Chase me," and the *Seville* asked nothing better. She was proud of her speed, and she was aching to fire her gun. She did. She fired it twice, in fact, after the proa had hauled her wind and surrendered.

Nakardike and Achmat received the boarders with outstretched hands spread wide open and palms up. They were innocent men, fishers who had lost their gear, natives of Timbu Mata, who had no grudge against the Spanish or leanings toward the sultan or his troops.

"Just so," said Alvarez, who could talk the Sulu lingo. "And that?" He pointed with his toe at a bajak lying in the port scuppers.

A bajak is an oyster rake made in the likeness of a hayrake and of very heavy wood; it has a heavy stone lashed to its under part to make it run true; it is a thing quite distinctive, for there is nothing else like it born of the sea, and Nakardike, like a fool, had never thought of heaving it overboard. Men do stupid things like that, especially men of the type of Nakardike and his assistant, Achmat, for Providence has ordained that murder shall always have for its shadow stupidity, and stupidity—what is it, but sister to the callousness that permits men to commit murder? Something is always overlooked.

There was also an oyster shell forgotten; there was also a stain on the deck that much scraping had not removed. A stain on the deck was nothing. It might

be shark blood or what not. But why the scraping?

Now, Alvarez, though only a lieutenant in the Spanish navy, on duty at Jalo, was a man of parts. He could reason, using facts as counters of thought, and that is the most difficult thing in the world; also, he was thorough.

What followed now was most curious. Nakardike, put through the third degree and the Spanish torture of the tarred rope, handed up the pearls, all save the great one, and, had Alvarez been another man, he would have departed with the loot, satisfied with a good morning's work. But he was Alvarez, and, taking Nakardike below into the dog hole of a cabin, he felt his head like a phrenologist—finding not only the bump of acquisitiveness, but a lump which was the pearl tied up in a bit of fish skin and bound in the hair, so that Alvarez had to cut it loose with his pocketknife.

He had guessed instinctively that Nakardike was holding some of the pearls back, and he had glimpsed the little lump beneath the hair, but he never expected anything like this.

Here was fortune. Guitars, girls, bull fights, pleasure in Seville, or, better, Paris—Paris! Paris—that was the place of all places. In five beats of a pendulum, such is the power of mind, he had mapped and colored his future. He put the pearl in his pocket; no one had seen it. It was a secret between himself and the man of Sulu. The secret had to be sealed.

He brought Nakardike on deck.

Now this bloodhound of a man had not only scented hidden loot, but also he was convinced in his mind that a white man had been boss of the proa and had been murdered for the sake of the pearl. Two things told him of this—the stain on the deck and an old shoe lying in a corner of the dog hole below.

Did he accuse Nakardike? Not a bit. He ordered his men to unshackle the halyard of the big sail and put the rope round Achmat's neck.

He knew that if murder had been committed, both men were in the business. There was no accusation. If murder had been committed, Achmat would think that Nakardike had confessed down be-

low, putting the blame on him—Achmat—and would try to escape by a counter accusation. It was beautifully reasoned and swiftly done, and the result justified the reasoning.

Achmat confessed everything, accusing Nakardike, who confessed everything, accusing Achmat.

Alvarez hanged them both and made a target of the proa, at five hundred yards, sinking her at the sixth shot.

THEN he went back to Jalo, and reported a naval affair, in which he multiplied the proa by six; handed over the small pearls, said nothing about the great one, and settled down to brood and make plans for the future. His cleverness had brought him to an impasse. Up to this he had been careless and happy; now, with fortune in his waistcoat pocket, he was discontented.

All the fun in the world was waiting for him, and he was tied to Jalo. He was on war service and could not resign his position; he could not disclose his treasure; he could not sell the thing in the East. He had long, casual talks with Ah Wong, a Chinese trader who supplied Jalo with provisions, and Ah Wong, who knew everything about everything saleable, gave it as his opinion that for the sale of jewels London or Paris was the only market; unless, indeed, one could get hold of one of the native princes of India.

But all this talk was no use to Alvarez. He was tied to Jalo and the Sea of Sulu. There was no escape for another five years, at least, and he could not wait.

One day he was ordered to take the *Seville* on a scouting expedition to the Borneo coast near Maraop. He ran her through the Sibutu passage and piled her on a charted reef near the entrance to Darvel Bay.

The boat he escaped in ran to Timbu Matu. Here he and his men turned pirates—they were pirates, anyway—licensed up to this, unlicensed now.

This piracy business was not his intention. His intention was to get to Europe with the pearl and the small amount of money he had taken with him from Jalo, but he was more or less in the hands of

his men. These ruffians, seizing a big proa and killing the owners, were like jinn he had evoked, and he had to go with them and be parcel of their doings; and he was a bit of a jinni himself.

Powerfully armed for those days and waters—they had taken rifles and ammunition before leaving the *Seville*—they were a match for anything they were likely to meet. But the business was frankly rotten. The small vessels they met could only supply them with provisions or tobacco. Once they got a bag of dollars, and once some tins of Canton opium. There was nothing in it but the gamble and the satisfaction of the plunder instinct, and all the time Alvarez, though steadily degrading, kept tight to his pearl and his dreams of Europe.

He was the only one of the lot who knew anything of navigation, and past Laut he began to edge them west into the Java Sea. They had kicked off their clothes with their civilization. Naked and brown, wearing loin cloths and with long hair, more terrible than the men of Sulu, they were an affront to the spirit of the white man. And Alvarez was not the least terrible; the pearl that had led him to all this he had secreted in his long hair, following the hint given him by Nakardike, and the money he had brought with him from Jalo he had hidden beneath a plank below, against the time when he might be able to use it.

One day off Banka, they sighted a small brig coming east, and the brig, sighting the proa, altered her course; they chased, reckoning on the small size of the prey and its timidity.

When the two vessels were within a mile of one another, the wind failed and fell to a dead calm, and the proa putting out her sweeps crawled like a venomous brown beetle across the glassy swell toward its victim.

The brig was the *Itang*, Captain Schmerder, Dutch owned and making to Batavia from Calcutta, with a cargo of cotton goods. The proa came right alongside of her, and Alvarez and his ruffians boarded her. They had killed the captain and half the crew and driven the rest below, closing the hatch on them, when—

Around the shoulder of far-off Gasper Island came the *Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft*, the new Dutch gunboat on the Batavia station, firing up for all she was worth and with her crew rushing to stations.

It is funny to think that all these vigorous happenings had been, so to speak, lying, perdu in a quiet old oyster of the Sulu Sea, to be fished up and set free by Alvarez; yet so it was, and, with the pearl which was the core of them in his hair and fighting to the bitter end, he was killed with all his men, on May 16, 1882, in the last battle with pirates that took place in the Java seas.

NOW, what happened to the pearl, and who discovered it in his hair and managed to secrete it and bring it to Amsterdam and sell it for eight hundred pounds—a wretched price—to a jeweler of the Heeren Graght? I am not going to say. To be honest, I don't know.

It is enough to know that the Amsterdam diamond merchant sold it for twice the amount to a jeweler of the Rue de la Paix in Paris, who sold it to Prince Muroff, who gave it to Margaret Stein at a luncheon at the Café de Paris, who, wishing to emulate Cleopatra, called for a glass of vinegar to dissolve it in. Learning its value from the prince, she put it in her pocket, instead.

It was in a little red-morocco case and undrilled as yet, and she took it home and forgot it. That seems to you impossible, which proves that you do not know the mentality of Margaret Stein and her tribe. Stolen by Rosalie, her maid, it passed into the possession of Monsieur Bourgeois, at a price which permitted Rosalie to set up a bonnet shop in the Rue du Mont Thabor, and if you had passed that shop with a friend and said to him, "Look, that business came out of an oyster that lived in the sea of Sulu," he would not have believed you, nor would he have believed the same statement made concerning the new café which Monsieur Bourgeois opened that same year in the Rue St. Honoré.

In those times, just as all good defunct Americans go to Paris, all good jewels went at last to Russia—or nearly all.

The pearl came to Russia. It had been badly drilled in Paris, a thousandth part of an inch out of the true, so it wouldn't hang properly if strung on a necklace; it had to be worn by itself on a thin chain. When Princess Anakoff opened the little box on her birthday, she cried: "Oh, what a size!" Then, when she heard of the drilling and that it could not be made the foundation of a new necklace, she pouted, made a scene, and the prince, who was a minister of state, flew into "one of his tempers," tried to throw the thing out of the window, broke a vase, and went off to attend to his official duties in a condition of mind that left its small, but ineradicable, mark on the future history of Russia.

The pearl was locked away with other discarded jewels. It had been the innocent cause of a lot of dark work. It had killed Alvarez and his men; it had incited the spirit of thievery in the hearts of more than a few, and now it was out of harm's way, or out of men's way, which amounts to the same thing. Out of harm's way and securely locked up in a safe made by Borodinski—the Griffiths of Russia—and in the company of some musty old documents, the title deeds of houses in Paris and Vienna, and some miniatures of the early Anakoffs done by Poushkin.

Also, there was a watch by Lépine, a few jade ornaments, and a huge turquoise that had come across the Urals in a Tartar's cap in the time of Attila.

Wonderful stories that turquoise could have told, had it possessed memory and a tongue. Possessing neither, it was dumb—as was the pearl.

Years passed.

Once the door of the safe was flung open, and a madly laughing woman seized the documents and flung them about on the floor. Then with one of them she struck a bearded man on the face, who, in a rage, struck at her and missed, while another man, pale and thin and dressed in black and seeming moved by sudden fury, drew an ivory-handled revolver from his breast pocket and shot the bearded man. The latter fell, face down, on the floor, flinging up his arms as he fell.

Then the documents were shot back into the safe and the smoking revolver with them, and the door was shut, and the pearl and its companions found themselves in darkness and silence again, after this momentary glimpse of the strange world that surrounded them.

For a long time nothing happened—how long, who knows?—years—during which the documents were evidently uncalled for, like the jewels. And then one night the doors of the safe flew open to the beating of drums and cries and shrieks and flare of torches from the street, on which the room opened, and a white-haired woman was gathering everything in a pillow case—documents, pearl, jade ornaments, and all.

NEXT thing, after many weeks, a blaze of light, and the pearl was in the hand of Ben Oued, the jeweler of Constantinople. Then in a few weeks it was in London, in the office of Romanes, the dealer, and a thick-nosed elderly man, with a flower in his coat, was saying:

"I would like to buy something for my wife—something of character. Diamonds—no; she has all she wants. Ah, let us look at that pearl—badly pierced, worth very little!"

"Pearls are jumping every day, Mr. Gunderman," said Romanes, filling a glass with water and putting the pearl in the water, where it instantly and almost completely vanished from sight, thus proving its worth. Then he weighed it in a little scales, then he put it back on its chain.

"How much?" asked Gunderman and concluded the purchase of the pearl.

Two hours later the new purchaser came back to the Savoy Hotel, where he was staying. Mrs. Gunderman was having afternoon tea at a little table in the dance room. She was stout and florid, and when he gave her his present, and she opened the box and saw the great pearl on its little chain, she thought from its size that it was false; also, it was on a two-penny-half-penny-looking little chain.

"It's platinum," said he, referring to the chain. Then he told her the price he had paid, and she lost her temper. She had set her mind lately on emeralds,

she had said nothing on the matter to him, but subconsciously and half consciously she had been turning toward emeralds. And now this thing which did not appeal to her at all—and at such a price!

He told her that pearls were increasing in value—that they were jumping every day. But the activity of pearls did not interest her. She said not a word about emeralds, but she frankly told him he had been "done." She had to say something nasty, and unconsciously she said the thing that would hurt the most, reflecting as it did on his business capacity.

The accusation of doing a man—within the limits of the law—would have been something of a compliment, but to accuse him of being done—well—

Flying into a temper, he left her and sought solace in the American bar.

Then, when they came down to dinner at half past seven, he found she was wearing the pearl as a sort of make-up to him. He had recovered his temper, and, as he sat opposite to her during the meal, his eyes traveled about the room.

"You don't know how well that pearl looks, Sarah," said he. "It's a new idea wearing one strung like that. Look at all those women and their pearl necklaces, and not one genuine, I bet. You see, they make them now so good you can't tell the difference. But that thing tells itself for genuine at once, because no one would wear an imitation alone like that."

"I suppose so," said she, without disclosing the fact that she had quite made up her mind to get him to sell the thing and purchase the emeralds she now acutely longed for.

"I must get it insured to-morrow," he went on. "It will go in with the rest of your things at Lloyds." He took a gold cigarette case from his pocket and gave her a cigarette, then he lit up, and a little later they stepped into their limousine and were driven a hundred yards away to the Strand Theater.

Here, under the influence of the genius of Berry, they forgot everything for a couple of hours, returning to the Savoy and their suite, where Julius Gunderman was just in the act of pouring himself out

a whisky and soda, when his eyes became fixed on his wife.

"Where's the pearl?" he asked.

It was gone. The platinum chain was there, but the pearl was gone. Everything was there, even the little platinum wire that had pierced the thing. The wire had broken, that was all.

Like demented creatures they ran about the room searching the carpet, under the chairs, everywhere. He examined her dress, shaking out the folds. Nothing!

Bidding her stay where she was, lest by some chance it might be stuck somewhere in her clothes, he came out in the corridor, hunting along to the elevator, rang for the elevator, searched its floor, and came down in it. Then he burst out of it, like a bombshell, calling to the attendants to help in the search.

"A pearl—a big round pearl. I gave a large sum for it to-day. It's gone. One hundred pounds to whoever finds it!"

But it was not to be found. Out in Savoy Court you might have seen men who seemed to be hunting for mushrooms by lamplight—a quest that would have been just as fruitful. It was gone—and it was not insured.

HE was thirteen years and some months old, but Patrick Sweeny did not look it. He had been stunted by environment and heredity. Patrick at the moment was coming to the end of a perfect day. He had played truant from school, earned sixpence by taking a message for a shady-looking man to a shady public house, which message had caused two other shady-looking gentlemen to arise and go forth in a hurry, only to fall into the arms of the police—fished for sharks with a bent pin, until he had been ordered away by the police from the landing stage near Cleopatra's Needle; seen a corpse being brought ashore at Westminster Bridge, received, after an hour's vigil outside the tobacco shop, close to Charing Cross underground station, two cigarette cards, one telling the history of the Gloire de Dijon rose and the other the history of the Discobolus, both illustrated; stuffed himself with gumdrops and two chocolates and seen a dog run over.

That was all mixed and good and brought him to lighting-up time and the news of the day exhibited by the newspaper sky signs. Here he learned that Trojan had won at Kempton Park, and that Mussolini had sent a message to the League of Nations, and that Lloyd George was suffering from a chill at Churt.

Divided between Fleet Street and the West, he chose the latter and was rewarded by a taxicab accident at Piccadilly Circus.

Theater—turning-out time found him now in the Strand, and, coming along by the Strand Theater, the eyes that took in everything in heaven and earth and on the pavement saw a big white bead, which was promptly pouched, also a cigarette end that lay a little farther on, which he stuck in his mouth and lit with a moldy old match.

Then came the thought of home and Cassidy's Rents.

Cassidy's Rents were not closed for the night; in fact, when Patrick arrived, Billy Meehan, a person of his own age, was just arriving home from the opera—at least, from in front of the opera house in Covent Garden, where he had had no luck; and Pat's mother had only just gone to bed in the room which his father, his mother, himself and little Noreen called their home.

The door was on the latch, for they are all honest people there. Anyhow, there's nothing to steal. The elders in bed were asleep and snoring, like two people chloroformed and taking the anæsthetic badly. But Noreen, eleven years old, in the rag bed on the floor near the window, was not asleep.

A wee white face showed in the moonlight. She was half sitting up on her elbow. She had been waiting for Pat, for he generally brought her something. As he took off his old boots, before getting into bed beside her, fully dressed as he was, the whisper came in the moonlight: "What 'a' ye got me?" Her demand was followed by the answer: "Cards—and them." He put the dirty paper bag holding three last gumdrops in her hand. Then he remembered the bead and handed it to her.

It made her forget the gumdrops.

It looked beautiful in the moonlight. It was like a little vague lamp, and it held the sick child. For she was very sick, so that she forgot to ask for the cards. And Pat forgot them, too, for he was in bed beside her now, snuggling down under the old quilt, and almost at once he was sleeping a sleep that many a rich man would have bought at a pound a minute.

Not only did the bead look like nothing else, but it felt like nothing else, so smooth and friendly and warm. She noticed the little hole in it and guessed it was meant to put on a string; but she did not want it on a string; she only wanted to hold this lovely bead and look at it and turn it about and feel it.

Then the fear came to her that Pat would want it back. Pat was that sort; though good-hearted enough, he had taken back several things he had given her.

She fell asleep with it in her hand, and it was there when she awoke in the morning, her father gone to work, her mother scolding Pat who was pulling on his

boots, and the sun shining through the dirty window.

It looked even more beautiful when she had a peep at it in the daylight, when her mother's back was turned. Some days later when Mrs. Sweeny asked her:

"What are you hidin' under the pillow, Noreen?"

"Nothin', mummy. It's only an old bead Pat give me, but don't tell him, or he'll be wantin' it back," said Noreen.

And I doubt if Mrs. Sweeny would have taken it from her had she thought it of value, for Noreen was "going out." And when some days later she was gone, far, let us hope, from Cassidy's Rents, her grubby little hand was holding something tight—her last plaything, which nobody tried to take from her—and rightly, had they only known, for she was the only person who had loved the thing for its beauty and for itself.

Yet all the same, true to the history of gems, it was tragic—this wealth in the hand of one who had died from *tabes mesenterica*—which is one of the many Latin names doctors give to poverty.

ART IN TEXAS

ONE thinks of Texas as a place of vast plains, innumerable ranges, and that section of the United States where the Mexican border is not a state of mind or a word in discourse, but a perennial fact. Now Texas comes forward with a big artistic program. To encourage art within her borders the San Antonio Art League has recently offered fourteen thousand, five hundred dollars in prizes for the best oil paintings placed in competition during the present year. That Texas' interest in art is no mere rhetorical flourish is abundantly substantiated by this practical encouragement of the artist. In his effort to reach out for the things of the spirit—an effort which every people in history has made, as soon as it has satisfied its pressing bodily wants—the Texan has shown his love for his native State. The pictures submitted for the prizes must come under one of three groups: one group includes Texas wild flowers, another Texas landscapes, and a third must depict ranch life. An imaginative artist will not find it difficult to find a subject for his talent among such a rich variety of material. Range life alone offers no end of opportunity to a real painter who can grasp its marvelous pictorial quality. This appreciation of art which Texas makes is an indication that no section of this country can be shut out of the kingdom of the beautiful indefinitely. Henry James, who said some sharp things about our crudeness, insisted that it took history to make a tradition, and a long tradition to create taste, and a very long taste to make art. This, perhaps, was truer in his day than ours. The facilities for travel and the interchange of ideas among nations to-day has brought about a keener appreciation of the beautiful. The voice of art has penetrated to the four quarters of the globe.



The Broadening Trail

By Don McGrew

Author of "Men Command Men," Etc.

The frontier lad, Buck Hilton, reaches the goal of his long and dangerous quest—and another goal, besides

IN FIVE PARTS—PART V.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BUCK'S DILEMMA.

EVEN after Matilda and the colonel had departed eastward for a long visit, "Buck" still harbored something of resentment. And to this resentment was added the fact that he kept seeing her eyes and the shifting blue lights in the waves of her hair, and the absorbed manner in which she occasionally cupped her chin in her hand and gazed thoughtfully across the Wyoming table-lands. It had now come to this point with him: Did he or did he not owe a sense of loyalty to an Indian girl who might perhaps be dead?

If in her calculations Matilda deliberately planned to test the truth of the old adage, that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," she succeeded admirably. He missed her more and more—the con-

tralto tones of her voice, her utter naturalness, her frank companionship, her sudden smile that seemed to take his breath and warm his heart.

Hence, when winter came relentlessly down from the land of the Crees, the young foreman occasionally raised his drawling baritone in song. And when he tilted his head and sang one of his ditties, the boys would chortle deliriously, but Ma understood.

"Laws o' mercy!" she said once, rubbing the frost away from the window to see Buck going across the snow to the corral. "A body could tell, if only by his singin'. He's got suthin' on his mind."

"Mind?" said Dan, putting down his paper.

"Yes, Dan'l—mind. A woman."

"Shure, that's wot a woman w'u'd think."

"Well, when a blessed boy gets to dip-pin' his coffee with his fork, I reckon it's mighty apt to be suthin' besides poker he's a-moonin' over!" And Ma chuckled contentedly. Within the past year Ma had occasionally regarded her boy's back with caustic reproach, but she now indulged him most scandalously.

"W'u'd a bhoys in love be 'atin' buffalo steaks an' piles av buckwheat cakes, belike?" Dan dryly countered. "He's pretendin'. Now, whin love came to *me*, shure an' I c'u'd not ate a mouthful for days."

But Ma threatened him with the broom, and he surrendered.

In this fashion winter wore on, with no further developments from The Smiler and the Black Hills situation. Once, when he was riding over the snow, Buck saw The Smiler and Son-of-bear off on the horizon. Later he heard that the young Indian frequently visited the Bar N Ranch and was drinking heavily with the two squaw men. Still later he was informed that Snow had given his squaw an "Indian divorce" and intended running for the Territorial legislature.

"Can yiz beat that?" Dan roared. "The boys say he'll get quite a backin', too. 'Tis bekaze he's got a pull in Washington an' can get things for this new Territory."

WINTER finally began to loosen reluctantly its hoary grip before the advance of spring. Presently, then, there came a day when cheery sun and warm, whispering breezes permeated all the slowly awakening earth, till up out of the snow there peaked one ridge top after another, basking in the mellow light. Warm, gentle streams floated languorously through the keen air, kissing Buck's smooth brown cheeks, breathing love messages to the thawing sap, and bidding softly the flowers to open their buds.

Into this day Buck rode upon his horse, Blacky, there to be alone and face his issue. Love Matilda? The affair with Rose-dawn now held the semblance of a dream.

"I never knowed it could be like this," he whispered to his horse. "I never

knowed there could be such a feelin' in the world."

He now looked fondly upon his own herd with new eyes. His herd! He no longer felt resentfully that it had been thrust upon him, somewhat in the nature of a gift. Of course, it was only a *small* herd; but he would make it grow. Later, there might be gold. At all events, he felt now that he would not speak until he could offer to Matilda a competence of which he need not be ashamed.

Thus were his feet set willingly and securely upon that rocky trail which Red Cloud would have softened with pine needles. But on the very day this occurred, he received a bit of news which struck him like a blow. Rose-dawn had at last been definitely located.

"She is unharmed, because she has made big medicine for those Indians," Red Cloud informed him. "She has been kept a prisoner above the clouds." And the Sioux gestured toward the sinking sun.

There to westward, far beyond the Bighorns, projected in changeless immobility a rectangular fortress of peaks. The world was shut off from a vast inclosure by an almost unbroken rampart of cliffs. To northward of it lay the geyser lands, with its chasms and tangles of mysterious pines; and from these the Snake River entered the rectangle, rushing away to southward, through gorges almost impossible of passage. Entrance into the place was effected with hazard, for the Snake River's tributary streams raced down through courses deep and widening, and other routes were but unmapped game trails on narrow ledges, oftentimes hanging over abysmal gulfs of space.

In this solitude, with the beetling Teton furnishing a blue-and-silver background for her dark hair and tragic eyes, Buck visualized Rose-dawn, a prisoner. What thought had been hers, as she paced there, year after year, in that amphitheater above the clouds? He shut his eyes against the pity of it. Yet now he faced an issue from which he shrank with keenest dread.

Red Cloud told him that fifty Sioux warriors were going upon what to them

constituted a religious crusade. In solemn council they had vowed to release their big-medicine woman, who chanted incantations where the eaglet's pinions spread. And this stirred Buck to his depths. Owing the Indian girl no moral debt, this son of the mountain and prairie solitudes, nevertheless, felt one thing deeply. He had *told* Rose-dawn that he would marry her. Now he knew that she was alive to reclaim that pledge. How, then, if the Sioux were successful in capturing Rose-dawn, could he tell Matilda of his love?

When Matilda and the colonel returned, Rose-dawn's rescuers had not been heard from. Consequently he found the very sight of Matilda the most exquisite torture. Imagining that he was revealing nothing of this, he strove to greet her casually. Whereupon Matilda, after one swift lightning glance, became joyously filled with tyranny. What Matilda told her thereafter was a confirmation of her intentions. Matilda laughed low and raced off to see Ada's recent gift from the stork.

Then unwarningly upon the frontier there burst a bit of news which was a match to tow. A Sioux squaw from the Black Hills had revealed a gold nugget of extraordinary size.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNDERCURRENTS.

ALL Cheyenne and Sioux City were aflame. The residents cynically reasoned that moves would be made now to break ruthlessly the treaty of '68. The news was brought to Buck by a perturbed Zeke, while he was off on the spring round-up. He said that, after receiving permission to dig from Red Cloud of the Ogallalas, Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapas and Spotted Tail of the Brules, The Smiler and a party of twenty-seven people had left Sioux City, intent on prospecting in the Black Hills.

"Red Cloud thinks now they'd better sell peaceably than lose out altogether in the end," Zeke explained. "The Smiler started this. He got round Son-of-bear first, an' the Hunkpapa spotted him to the claim."

Later, he reasoned, The Smiler brought about the display of the nugget through Gray Squirrel. For obviously the giant must start the wheels turning inexorably toward a general rush if he was to work his mine in safety.

"I had a talk with Spotted Tail," Zeke resumed. "From what I pieced together, Smiler took Snow in. Snow is the one who convinced Spotted Tail that it would be best to let people prospect and then sell. That, in turn, helped influence Red Cloud. Sitting Bull gave in only because the other two were against him."

"Where are they prospectin'?"

"Miles from Four Points. I made a bee line for the reservation soon as I heard."

"Don't the soldiers know about the prospectors?"

"Not so far as I know."

Gravely Buck considered the prospects. Informing the military would frustrate his enemy's scheme only for a time. Furthermore, some Indian not in sympathy with the chiefs' action would sooner or later inform the officials.

"The milk is spilled," he said. "We can let our claim——"

"Ours?"

"Ours," Buck insisted. "Was that claim you got in '60 'yours?' Now, we can let ours lay safely yet a while. Red Cloud won't stand for any one touchin' it, even if they discover it. That ain't likely, either. But I see thunder clouds in the sky. Thing to do is drive these cattle and cows down south of the line of the huntin' grounds."

Buck's foresight in this movement was soon verified. By the time the military officials were told of the prospecting party, and promptly took steps to round them up, twenty-five shafts had been sunk. Gold was uncovered in every one of them. The prospectors were taken to Fort Laramie, but their inflammatory story spread; and then the government officials, with remarkable consistency, sent Custer with a military expedition into the Black Hills.

One of the intentions was to ascertain approximately the probable extent of the mineral wealth. Another was the expressed desire to sound out thoroughly

the Indian chiefs and ascertain their attitude toward a possible sale. But this last intention might have been effected by a simple delegation. Deep beneath this armed thrust into the Indian country was a Machiavellian hope. It was hoped within political circles that Custer's column would excite beyond control the younger red men. An Indian attack against this presumably peaceful expedition might take the wind from the sails of their sentimental Eastern sympathizers. Thus would the way be paved for launching a final war of subjugation.

THE immediate results were not precisely what the plotters had wanted, but results were nevertheless obtained. Sweat-stained riders tore over ridges and through the sage of cattle land, with the laconic message: "The Injuns have the paint on." For, though the bulk of the Sioux stood fast, and no attacks were made on Custer, the Cheyennes under Dull Knife, Two Moons, and Yellow Hand, and the tattooed Arapahoes behind Man-alive-at-dawn sallied with their ringing whoops and fluttering war bonnets upon the warpath. Though they did not share in that part of the reservation including the Black Hills, they foresaw the effect of its occupation by whites.

No sooner had these tribes begun the war dance than Red Cloud took steps to protect the ranchers to whom the Sioux had granted grazing rights. To them he sent Ogallala warriors solemnly instructed to warn off raiders. Nor did the astute Sitting Bull release his Hunkpapas against the ranchers at this juncture. That chieftain was craftily playing for a crisis which would solidify the majority of the Sioux in rebellion and place him at the head of the nation. Until the time was ripe, he did not want to antagonize unnecessarily Red Cloud, with his nine thousand Ogallalas.

Thus the greater part of the Lone Star herds were worked safely southward, while the Cheyennes and Arapahoes savagely fell upon gold-mad parties which insisted on prowling the hills. Several of these were killed to a man. Stage-coaches and wagon trains on the way to

Montana, along the Bozeman Trail, were also attacked. This continued till a detachment of soldiers and Shoshone scouts clashed with over three thousand of the painted Indians on the Powder River. The consequent defeat of Dull Knife sent his warriors scurrying back to the agencies.

There, for a time, they washed off the paint. They were ready to draw supplies and wriggle their fingers derisively at the enraged soldiers, who were not allowed to follow and fire upon them within the reservation proper.

When this lull occurred, and the Ogallalas left Buck, the summer was well advanced. Custer's expedition by this time had demonstrated one thing, at least, effectually. Public sentiment in the East was almost unanimous in decrying the movement. Neither was any agreement reached with the Sioux as to a sale. They agreed only to think it over. So orders were peremptorily issued to exclude all whites by military force from the Dakota reservation. But, undaunted by this, companies were formed in Cheyenne, Laramie, Sioux City, and other points. Like dogs at the leash, impatiently they tugged at the feeble and reluctant government hands, hungrily eying the undoubted wealth awaiting them there in the North.

"And they won't hold all of them back," Buck prophesied.

"Which will mean more outbreaks," Matilda commented.

Zeke thereupon took Buck aside. "That Smiler is mighty sore over being hauled out. I look for trouble."

"Does a man have to look far for that in this country?" Buck countered, with a smile.

But he could not make Zeke smile in return.

"From certain remarks he has made, I know he figures we had a hand in tipping off the swatties," he declared.

"Yes, probably."

"Well, he may be able to start something." And Zeke nodded significantly at old Bear-at-bay.

Buck smiled. Bear-at-bay, who had calmly constituted himself official hunter for the ranch, would have liked nothing

better than another legitimate chance to lift a Sioux scalp.

"The old Pawnee won't do anything to bring trouble on us, though," said Buck.

"No. But do the Sioux know that? He's a Pawnee to them. Now, if The Smiler can make use of that fact——"

Breaking off, Zeke meditated frowningly.

"I got this family into this jam, and now I'm going to tell 'em!" he declared at last.

With head erect and face pallid, Zeke carried this into effect. He kept back only the location of Buck's mine. And the family in solemn conclave heard it with amazement. Then it forgave him collectively and individually, with many a resounding clap on the back.

"I had to tell you so you'd know what you've got to fear, and why," said Zeke, dashing the tears from his eyes. "Maybe you'll want to pull out."

"Pull out?" cried Matilda. "Not us. We're here, and we stick."

"Right!" the family echoed in one voice.

"All I can say is, I wish I hadn't listened so close to that sky pilot," Rocky asserted ironically.

"How's that?" old Gregory mildly inquired.

"I'd shore bushwhack that Smiler an' Snow, too."

The laugh this evoked was not echoed by one person on the ranch. That person was Bear-at-bay. When next morning came out of the cloudless east, he was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared on his pony, without taking any one into his confidence.

"Hunting, d' y' suppose—or what?" Buck inquired musingly of the colonel.

The colonel looked off across the sultry coulees. They now were thick with heat and seemed to act like magnets to draw down more precipitately the red-hot rays of a brassy sun.

"You may search me," he said. "But I'd guess if he spots The Smiler——" And the colonel carelessly shrugged. "If he does, I'll not ask him any questions when he gets back, I'm telling you."

The sun mounted ever higher into the

glazed sky, eventually reaching its peak and sliding down to its final splurge of unimaginable colors behind the Bighorns, while afternoon shadows stole out—farther out—and night came on apace to lay its cooling dusk over all the heated earth. Still Bear-at-bay did not return.

THEN through the next sunny morning rode furiously a salt-and-dust-stained cavalryman from Fetterman. Another party of miners had been killed in the hills. Young Rain-in-the-face, confined in the guardhouse in the preceding year for ambushing and murdering two members of Custer's Montana expedition, had escaped. With some two hundred or more Hunkpapas he had defiantly broken from Sitting Bull's control. These insurgents were now out somewhere on the warpath.

Inasmuch as most of Buck's crew were then busy digging trenches and repairing pasture fences, this made no essential difference in his arrangements. The forces were at least well concentrated for defense in case of trouble. A day lookout was posted on the cliffs above the ranch buildings.

At sunset Bear-at-bay was still absent. Soon afterward the cook's triangle summoned the boys to supper, and the deep sheen of reds and blazing yellows gradually darkened and merged into deepest purple behind the mountain fortresses. This, in turn, became a dusky veil, into which mountain and coulees melted silently away. Presently the evening stars appeared, and a banjo tinkled musically down in the bunk house.

Into this night Buck presently strolled, saying that he intended to take the sentry some tobacco. At the main house Matilda had announced an impromptu taffy pull and dance. The bear rugs had been eagerly kicked aside, and Tuesday Knight was impishly "tickling the ivories," while Ada and Matilda laughingly instructed some of the boys in the intricacies of the waltz. Through the colonel's library window Buck could see old Gregory, limned in the candle-light, pulling softly at his thick beard, as he read religiously his beloved "Book of Mormon."

Soon some one would imploringly shout at the colonel to recite *Hamlet's* soliloquy, or dare Dan to dance a jig—which he could still do quite easily—or beg Rocky to give them his original version of a camp meeting. It all tugged at Buck's heart. He loved the warmth and the glow of it, the sincere, wholesome affection which smoothed over the minor differences of day to day and bound this family together as with hoops of steel. Yet just now he preferred solitude. For, if he returned, he must, as a matter of course, waltz with Matilda, and that was a source of perturbation he wished this night to avoid.

He had, therefore, paused near the corral fence to look at the tip of the moon, just showing in the east, when from the sentry's position there came a shot. Buck immediately ran lightly toward it. He found Bitter Root staring menacingly into the dark. A Winchester was smoking in his hands.

"Suthin' shore moved out there!" Bitter Root tensely whispered.

Silence had now fallen on the main house. The tapers were blown out. Buck and the cowboy meanwhile cautiously surveyed the immediate foreground. Crawling forward to the point indicated by Bitter Root, the foreman's hand struck a warm patch of blood.

"Damn if you didn't ventilate him somewhere!" Buck said on his return. "Vamosed now, though."

"Must 'a' been an Injun, then."

"How come?"

"Never yipped when I salted his tail."

Buck made no comment. Again they listened intently. Out of the darkness came dolorously the chirping of crickets and the staccato barking of prairie dogs. A wolf howled long and mournfully off to the right. An owl dismally hooted and was echoed at another point in the sage.

"Them owls is Injun signals," whispered Bitter Root.

His companion at first made no rejoinder. Buck was puzzled. Clouds now swam lazily across the face of the barely risen moon, and the darkness was impenetrable. It laid its spell upon them, beckoning irresistibly to those imps of

imagination which persist in filling the dark with spectral mysteries. But Buck brushed these contemptuously aside. He had received no message of alarm via that telegraph system which we call instinct.

One thing was, nevertheless, patent. Bitter Root had assuredly struck something, and that something was not an animal. Its silence and its ghostly retreat precluded that possibility. So Buck ordered Bitter Root closer to the main house and started in to tell the family of the occurrence.

IT was thus he unexpectedly ran into Matilda. She was breathing rather quickly. She had, she said, become worried after the shot and had slipped out to learn the reason.

To her inquiry he vouchsafed a brief explanation. Her sigh of relief was unmistakable. And, as she still stood there, with something altogether delectable radiating maddeningly from her hair and her faintly parted lips, Buck's thoughts became blurred. Resolves ran from him, as water leaves a cask when split assunder. Racing clouds ran through his brain, and fire shot through his veins. Before he could check the impulse, or was even thoroughly conscious that he had acted, his arms had hungrily swept her close.

She made no resistance against him. She merely bowed her head, while into her soft hair he brokenly poured all the pent-up heartaches of the past and the nature of the quandary which had brought him mental agony.

Not until he had finished did she quietly release herself. Her eyes were bright and starry. But her voice was hers to command. It was low and well controlled.

"So that is what you thought," she said.

Already he was full of contrition.

"I didn't mean to make yuh think that—" he began.

"That all you had to do was reach out and grab me?" she cut in.

"I feel as though I had no right to grab anybody," he admitted miserably, dropping his head. "Not after givin' my

word to Rose-dawn. But to-night——" His gesture aptly described his temporary impotency before the tidal wave of feeling which had shaken him to his depths and swept him from his anchorage.

If Matilda had, with malice aforethought, played for this moment, her victory could have been no sweeter. Assuredly an observer might have said that fierce elation momentarily blazed in the eyes now bent on that dejected figure. Was this the panoplied wild man who walked at perfect ease among the most dangerous men of a borderland still far from tame? At this moment his trappings were a mockery.

"You've made one mistake between liking and love, you say," she pointed out.

He admitted this with a slow nod, not looking up.

"Isn't it possible, then, that you might have made another?"

He did not at first understand.

"I've never taken any pains to hide the fact that I *like* you," she coolly elucidated. "But to assume the other——" She concluded with a slight shrug.

Deeply chagrined, Buck was for once at an utter loss. And before he could summon further words they were interrupted. Dan came out of the darkness. This necessitated further explanation of the shot and took them back toward the house. As Dan was full of conjectures, and thereafter monopolized the conversation, Buck was afforded no further opportunity for words alone with her.

The night thereupon wore on, with a deal of speculation as to the purpose of the prowler, till near midnight. At this hour Tuesday went into the cook shack, intending to make some coffee for the men on guard. There he stumbled on Ching Lee, gagged and bound with a lariat.

"Blear-at-blai!" he excitedly chattered, when released. "He muchy blood. He kletchum bullet hole in side leg."

"Ha! From Bitter Root?"

"I suppose maybe so. Blear-at-blai say flends shoot to-night. He grinny like hell. No givem damn. Paint on face like debbil. You sabby?"

"What did the old devil tie you for, though?"

"He flaid you kletchum, tie in chickee coop."

Buck grinned infectiously. "By jinks, we would, too. Then what did he do?"

"He kletchum one ham, kletchum sardines, kletchum tobacco, kletchum bleed. You sabby? Oh, much kletchum! Then he say, 'Go to hell, Ching Lee. Good-bye!'"

Thus the mystery of the night was explained. The paint meant the war-path. The stolen supplies also meant that Bear-at-bay did not want to risk a shot in shooting game. He was stalking some one, and he did not want his ambush disclosed.

"If it's a Sioux he's after——" Tuesday began dubiously.

"I reckon it's The Smiler he wants," Buck cut in amiably.

Bitter Root suggested that perhaps it might be well to start a search for the old fellow in the morning, just to be certain. But Buck and the older members of the circle merely smiled. For all practical purposes, Bear-at-bay had dissolved into thin air. The outcome appeared to be on the lap of the gods.

CHAPTER XL.

ROSE-DAWN SENDS A RIDER.

BUCK'S thought before he fell asleep that night were far from pleasant. Naturally, he had at times assumed that Matilda cared something for him. For, had she not given him more than one reason to believe so? But retrospection flooded him with color. His impulsive action had given rise to an erroneous impression. He had not *constantly* assumed any such thing. There had been many, many times when he had suffered poignantly all the throes of that consciousness of unworthiness which grips occasionally every lover and makes him marvel at his own temerity.

"Bet your life yuh found out where yuh stand, anyway," was his final lugubrious conclusion.

To the possibility that she might merely have been momentarily nettled, chagrined, and catty, he gave but scant

consideration. When Cupid adjusts the male binoculars there are never any claws discernible behind the wings of the beloved. He told himself that he had presumed unwarrantably and thereby had elicited a bitter truth. Life loomed before him as a black and hollow nightmare.

No further alarms occurred during the night; the sun came up over the ridges, showing the prairies without a sign of Indians: and after he had stationed the boys once more at their unromantic ditch digging, devoid of chaps, he came upon Matilda. By this time he had himself well in hand. She, too, was quite as usual, tapping her riding boot nonchalantly with her quirt. She eyed him very cheerily and in utter frankness.

"I did a deal o' thinkin' last night," he gravely said, without preamble. "I see how you feel. Well, that's all fair an' square with me. I'll not go back to wildness, either."

Queer little flames danced for the veriest instant in her eyes before they shone again with the sun of her friendly approval. She thrust out her hand.

"Splendid!" she said.

Thus she dispelled easily whatever of constraint there might have been between them, and cheerily drove the final nail into his coffin. Had she not set between them definitely the barrier of a perfect friendship?

Before the fatalistic advance of the sun's hot glare the morning's coolness now stampeded into the world's forgotten yesterdays. The boys in the ditches worked at a slow pace, with dripping handkerchiefs under their hats. The oatmeal water which Ma sent out to them received a royal welcome. And presently Buck donned chaps and pistol belt and roped Blacky. Some stray bronchos from the remuda had been sighted on the range, and he and Dan and a grateful Tuesday Knight rode out to herd them in.

They were well down the slope, and engulfed in a sweltering coulee, when Tuesday breasted the crumbling brink.

"Thought I saw a tiny puff o' smoke," he explained, as they joined him. He indicated a distant ridge.

Was it, or was it not, a faint sound which shortly came to them through the motionless air? As it filtered through the pure-white light, it suggested a blanketed report from somewhere deep in a mountain basin. But they were not sure. Nothing stirred there on the hazy ridge. Neither could their vision, from this position, take in uninterruptedly the whole immediate terrain. The surface of the earth was here a knotted outlay of uprisings and hollows, in the midst of which it was not difficult for the lurking bands of Indians to be hidden.

"Old Pat ain't givin' us no flash signal from the bluff, at least," Tuesday mused, looking back over his shoulder.

"No Injuns in sight now, anyway," said Dan.

"Still," Tuesday reasoned, "there might be some in one o' them draws. Pat can't see down into some o' them, even from the bluffs."

Buck rallied him with affectionate irony, and Tuesday laughed. "Well, come on," he grinned. "I ain't got much of a scalp to lose, anyway." With which they pressed on, seeking to circumvent the bronchos.

THESE led them to the east and north for a time, and they "cussed" heartily the satanic perversity of these wily horses, that dodged them so adroitly in the protracted heat. But even as they talked and grinned sympathetically at one another, grave watchfulness lurked in their level eyes. Despite the sunlight, this great, silent world, which reduced them to tiny atoms, had taken unto itself a solemn aspect, whispering voicelessly of tragedy and hidden danger.

The impression was enhanced by their view of the mountains. Off in the heated remoteness, the steel-gray and flint-brown tips of the Bighorns rose sheer and glaring, appearing as so many hard, serrated teeth above the colorless smudge, which at nearer hand became the swath of pine and spruce. These offered, in the glare of an endless sun, no soothing suggestion of the living green and cooling shades one caught on closer approach.

"They're mighty silent this mornin'," said Tuesday.

Presently Buck sighted a dot far off, which appeared on a ridge and went down again. It was a horse and rider, but, beyond that, the distance kept the man's intentions and identity a mystery. But now they looked at one another, for the man was riding away from the spot where Tuesday had seen the tiny puff of smoke.

"Reckon we might look into that," said Buck, reining toward the place.

Nearing the general location of the spot within a half hour, they spread out. Presently Tuesday called out that he had the trail and rode into a gully. Up the side of this he immediately spurred, calling laconically: "Well, here's a good Injun, anyway."

"Not Bear-at-bay?" Buck cried, riding up.

"Nope. Son-of-bear. He got a one-way ticket to Over Beyond."

"Ah-huh!" Buck responded, peering over. "And he got it in the back."

THEY then rode solemnly down the slope, which was of clay and yellow sand. It was plowed and gutted deeply by spring freshets from the melting snow above, with fan-shaped deposits at the bottom of each gully. Outcropping on the sides, ugly projections of hard, hot granite glinted dully in the sun. Gnarled and misshapen growths of scrub oak and white sage dotted the slant, precariously clinging to unlovely perches, where moisture had long since ceased to be. And, in the streaky shadow of one of these growths, near the base, lay Son-of-bear, face downward. He had been shot from behind.

Their eyes met thoughtfully over this indisputable fact. The body was still warm and lax and had not been scalped. Moreover, the Hunkpapa had not met death with the war paint on. And from the tracks they read with ease further details of the tragedy. He had been riding with a companion, at the gallop, when hit in a manner which brought instant death, and he had pitched from his pony to the alkaline dust. His companion, a large man in boots, had dismounted and lifted the body up under the scrub oak, the better to shield it from

the sight of circling vultures. The companion had then hurriedly mounted and galloped northward, leading the Indian's pony or letting it follow.

"The Smiler's tracks, shure enough," said Dan, pointing to cross-nail marks in the heel impressions left by the booted man. "He shtill belaves in scarin' off bad sperrits—the skunk!"

Tuesday pushed back his sombrero and rubbed at his head. His eyes were narrowed to slits.

"I don't see no ca'tridge around here, if The Smiler shot him," he mused speculatively. "Bet yore life, too, I wouldn't 'a' seen no puff o' smoke if that shot had been fired down here, where they was a-ridin'."

"I'll admit it looks funny, four ways from the jack," Buck admitted.

"Here's another point, too."

"Well, let's hear it."

"He never made no attempt to hide them boot tracks."

This was so obvious as to mock dispute.

"Another thing," Tuesday continued, rubbing one forefinger along the side of his long nose, "is that this Injun don't show no powder marks."

"Suppose The Smiler was ridin' some distance back?"

"Yeah, that's so. Still, we didn't hear but one shot."

"We wouldn't, down here in this coulee."

"Well, then, what's yore theory?"

"I'll still gamble my shirt that Bear-at-bay didn't plug this Injun," Buck loyally declared. "I mean, he wouldn't at this time."

"I'll add me own to thot bet," Dan emphatically added.

"Still," Tuesday urged, "The Smiler wouldn't plug this Indian. Where'd the percentage be in it for *him*?"

"Wouldn't be—lest the circumstances were right," Buck rejoined.

Forthwith they rode carefully back over the tracks. After a ride of several minutes they came up out of the gully and to a point where the two riders had taken up a furious run.

"Dollars to doughnuts, here's where the *first* shot was fired," Buck said now.

Tuesday was astonished. "The first?"
"Well, them two was joggin' along up to here, wasn't they?"

"Ah-huh."

"Then why did they take up the gallop so r'arin' sudden and hit for that coulee?" Tuesday found part of the answer, at least, in his swift survey of the terrain. A ridge to eastward commanded this sward, and a man stationed on top might easily have fired down upon an enemy riding here. He had also seen the tiny puff above one of these ridges.

"Reckon they were gettin' out of range of another shot from the ridge," Tuesday conceded.

"All right. Why didn't Son-of-bear fall from his horse here, then? Answer: he wasn't hit here."

"Shure, an' he couldn't 'a' been potted from any o' these ridges after he got into the coulee," Dan pointed out.

WHAT more they might have said was halted by Tuesday, who silently pointed at the bluff above the ranch. Signals were calling them back. They rode at once around a ridge and reconnoitered from the reverse side of the top. Far off to northward they descried moving specks. They did not need Pat's telescope to tell them that these were Indians coming on toward them.

"Reckon we'll drift," said Buck.

Now the Indians came into sight; again the coulees swallowed them; but ever as they rode it became more and more obvious that they were heading toward the gulch where lay, in its last sleep, the slack body of Son-of-bear.

"Our tracks all around, too," Tuesday grunted.

"Spilled milk now," Buck replied.

Shortly thereafter he saw far off on an eastern ridge a reconnoitering rider who came only momentarily into view and then abruptly whirled and whisked from sight.

"Spotted us too late," he remarked.
"My guess is that's Snow."

"Duckin' on general principles?"

"Wish I had time to find out. Suppose Chi Mullins had a pack horse loaded with ca'tridges behind that ridge?"

This elicited a cynical grin from Tues-

day. They loped on, then, ever on the alert for some sign of Bear-at-bay. Once they thought that in the figure of a lone Indian, who appeared out of a draw ahead, they had recognized him; but when they drew nearer they saw their mistake. He was a young Sioux.

This man proved to be an Ogallala courier from Red Cloud. They overtook him near the corral. Taking the young foreman aside, while Dan and Tuesday rode on, he bluntly informed him that at last Rose-dawn had been returned alive. Sixteen braves, he said, had paid with their lives the price of her rescue.

"Rose-dawn and her party are there with Red Cloud's hunting party," he explained, indicating a spot in the Big-horns to northwestward. A feast was in order; and Rose-dawn wished that Papoose-born-a-man might come at once.

The color drained from Buck's cheeks. Here was actuality staring him in the face. But he once more shoved his despondency ruthlessly into the background. He must first face the present issue. Pat called down from above that the Indians had disappeared into the gorge. By this time they had descried Son-of-bear. So Buck quickly explained the situation and asked the courier to return to Red Cloud at once.

"Papoose-born-a-man asks Red Cloud to come and judge between the words of Straight Tongue and Coyote Grin," he said.

"A papoose could do that," grunted the warrior. "But I go."

He remounted his pony and started, as Pat again sang out from above. The Indians were heading toward them.

CHAPTER XLI.

CRITICAL HOURS.

THEN Matilda, who had been talking to Dan, came forward. Buck briefly explained the message he had sent to Red Cloud, and she nodded with approval.

"It's twenty miles to Red Cloud, and he'll maybe not get here till dark," he said. "But if young Rain-in-the-face insists on fighting, we ought to be able to hold him off without much difficulty."

Again Matilda gravely nodded; but she glanced up at the group centered around Dan and Tuesday. There the colonel, now near seventy, was pulling fiercely at his gray mustache and looking out over the plains. By the quivering of the colonel's nostrils Buck read a story that touched his latent sympathies.

"Certainly I ain't goin' to shove him on the shelf," Buck whispered in response to the mute appeal in Matilda's glance. He stepped up the slope, followed gratefully by Matilda's misted eyes, and respectfully saluted the old soldier. "Sir," he said, "I'm foreman on peace days, but here's where we need a commander."

Delight, like a flash of lightning, blazed in the colonel's eyes. Responsibility seemed to add an inch to his height. His mustache fairly bristled, and he snapped into command with all the vigor of his youth.

The boys were forthwith ordered in from the ditches. Half gleeful, half serious, they came up eagerly, Sudden remarking: "Well, if it wasn't for the wimmen, I'd give ole Bear-at-bay a vote of thanks."

Rifles were gathered and a disposition of forces made in the canyon and in the buildings, which had been constructed and located with the possibility of defense in mind. Then they waited.

Soon Pat once more called out from above. Bear-at-bay had been sighted. He presently came riding in, somewhat weak from loss of blood, but presenting to view the features of a stone image.

"How!" was all he said when the colonel accosted him.

The colonel suppressed a grin and quietly informed him of the situation. Bear-at-bay's sloe-black eyes flashed; but this was the only emotion he betrayed.

"Wait and see what they say, and maybe I will speak," he answered gruffly.

Thirty minutes later found a body of nearly three hundred Hunkpapas emerging from a draw at the foot of the slope. All were in war paint. The Smiler was with them. They threw themselves on the ground, well out of rifle shot, while young Rain-in-the-face and The Smiler rode forward.

The colonel and Buck stepped out of the house to meet them. Matilda, Dan, Zeke, and the old Pawnee slowly followed.

As the pair advanced, it was seen that The Smiler had been wounded. His left shirt sleeve bore a big crimson stain.

"I reckon there's got to be a showdown here," he truculently began.

"Exactly," the colonel retorted. "We know Son-of-bear is dead."

"An' mighty lucky I ain't, too! Well, it ain't up to me. You jest go ahead an' explain yourselves to Rain-in-the-face." And The Smiler leered maliciously.

Young Rain-in-the-face, unlike his sister, could never master the labials and dentals of the English tongue. He looked, therefore, to Buck and Dan. A short, grim, heavy, and expressionless Indian, he sat immovable on his shaggy pony, while Buck told his story, and Dan nodded in verification.

"I believe you," said Rain-in-the-face at once. "You two, I know, have straight tongues. But I would ask a question."

"Ask it," said Buck.

"I believe you three did not shoot Son-of-bear. But what other from here was out there?"

Before they could be placed in an embarrassing position, the old Pawnee stepped forward. He thumped himself proudly on the chest.

"I was there," said he in Siouan. "I shot at that coyote," he declared, indicating The Smiler.

"Hit me, too!" The Smiler roared. He turned his shoulder, exposing a rent in his shirt. The bullet had struck glancingly against the shoulder blade. "Then," The Smiler charged, "he potted Son-of-bear."

"You lie!" the old Pawnee declared, with fierce dignity. "I fired but one shot. The lever of my gun would not work again. I did not see, but I *heard* the shot which killed Son-of-bear." He pointed dramatically at The Smiler. "No one but that man could have killed him!" he cried.

"Just what I reasoned!" Buck asserted. For, after the giant and his

companion fled to escape another shot from the ambush, and had been engulfed in the twists of the high-banked coulee. The Smiler had quite evidently visualized an opportunity too good to miss. With the bad feeling already engendered, and his own wound to further substantiate his story, it would not be difficult to kill the unsuspecting Son-of-bear and subsequently convince the Hunkpapas that some member of the Lone Star crew had committed the murder.

But The Smiler merely shrugged and knowingly leered at Rain-in-the-face, as if by the absurdity of this accusation the Pawnee challenged a child's credulity. Rain-in-the-face paid no heed, but looked appraisingly from Buck's strong, grave features to the weather-beaten countenance of Straight Tongue Dan Mulcahey.

"The messenger you sent to Red Cloud is with us," the Indian said, at last. "When he heard our story he decided to wait."

Buck schooled his features. "Well?"

"Your word I take. The Pawnee's I do not take. Give us the Pawnee."

For form's sake, Buck interpreted this to the colonel. Both, of course, knew the alternative. There were no soldiers nearer than sixty miles. But the colonel did not even hesitate.

"Not by a damn sight!" he roared.

Without another word the Indian and his companion abruptly whirled and rode down through the sunshine to where the eager warriors awaited them.

Five minutes later the first shot of the battle spitefully thudded against the logs of the main house.

THE tall bluffs behind the main house were at least twenty yards in the rear. Sheer and precipitate for long distances to right and left, they constituted an admirable protection against approach from the south. Mounting the bluffs would also aid the Indians but little. Tin and heavy logs on the roof of the main house safeguarded the inmates against fire and bullets from overhead, and the approach up the northern slopes offered only scattered bits of cover, within rifle range, for the enemy.

But a chasm split asunder the bluffs behind the buildings. Between its perpendicular walls wound the approach to the great upper pasture and the channel for the ranch's water supply.

The colonel had always reasoned that hostile Indians would attempt to work down through this canyon. By the side of the creek, that raced in sparkling ripples over the brown boulders, and at a point in the canyon some four hundred yards from the main house, he had, therefore, long ago built, within a grotto, a barricade of sandbags. It was well protected from overhead fire or dislodged boulders by overhanging ledges.

In this barricade, with rifles and ample ammunition, the colonel had stationed himself, former Sergeant Krueger, Pat Alberson, Rocky Moore, Dan Mulcahey, Bear-at-bay, old Gregory, Sudden McEwan, and Tuesday Knight. Buck and Zeke, with the remaining cow-punchers and the women, were left in the buildings.

"Us musketeers, d' y' see, must have the place of honor," Tuesday facetiously declared.

The others did not smile.

While the fighting progressed, this soon became manifest. For, though at first no shots were heard in the canyon. Rain-in-the-face had quickly detached a large force, whose purpose was made plain when they entered a fissure to westward and disappeared. The Indians before the house showed no disposition in the interim to rush. They contented themselves primarily with crawling forward to convenient dips, from which they fired upon the house. The grand attack would undoubtedly be launched by way of the canyon.

At first there was a minimum of danger within the main house. There, at three different points, were stationed the women, loading the reserve rifles. Buck and several of the men held the portholes. The remainder of the cow-punchers were secreted in the stables, the bunk house, and the homes of Dan and Zeke. Their fire was being withheld. Firing from the main house, which was at least sixty yards from the nearest building, was now continually sharp and designed to im-

press the Indians that this was the only structure occupied.

Upon this the Hunkpapas concentrated their scattering shots, but the barricaded windows held well. Now a bullet viciously splintered a sill. Again one sung with a wail through a porthole, blanching the women's cheeks. And now a leaden pellet zipped between a clink in the logs, smashing keys from the new piano. But as yet there were no casualties among the defenders.

"There's another good Injun, though!" "Counterfeit Bill" once exulted grimly, as a long-haired Sioux leaped and sprawled inertly. "Makes three we got, anyway."

BUT suddenly, near half past one, firing, like the beating of a riveting hammer, broke out in the canyon. Simultaneously there leaped up on the slope a group of Sioux, to the number of twenty or more. While their companions emptied their Winchesters at the main house, this score of yelling savages plunged for the cover of the other buildings.

The tense watchers in the house were not caught napping. Their fire ripped and blazed from the portholes. Bullets whipped and spat all around the zig-zagging Indians. The cliffs echoed to the malignant crack of the Winchesters, the ringing reports of the Remingtons, and the heavy thunder of the smashing Sharps.

Then, like a devastating blast, there flamed from the stables and the other structures a murderous cross fire. The advancing Indians pitched and fell, turned and ran, stumbled up and fell again, while bullets sang like angry bees about them. Wild cowboy yells joined with the Indian death chants and the screech of the remaining warriors to dispel the natural silence.

Some thirty seconds of this frenzied shooting elapsed; and where twenty had started, sixteen Hunkpapas now lay in grotesque attitudes, their war bonnets trailing slackly in the dust. Only four were able to escape back down the approach.

"They won't try that again for a

while!" Zeke said in immense relief, blowing the smoke from his breech.

But the defenders could no longer boast that they had escaped unharmed, for a bullet had torn its way through Counterfeit Bill's shoulder. Bitter Root was grimly regarding a minor flesh wound. Matilda hovered solicitously over Ma, who scoffed at a splinter scratch in the forearm. Ching Lee also mournfully inspected a minor wound in the arm.

While Buck was engaged in directing the smashing repulse of the Sioux, there before the house, he shoved into the background his anxiety over the canyon situation, lest his attention be diverted from the immediate crisis; yet he had kept one man stationed at the rear to watch for developments there; and now, as he enjoined the men to reload rapidly, he hastened to the back of the house. An ominous silence had fallen in the chasm. Nothing could be discerned there, save powder smoke which lazily drifted in the film of colors at the bend, shrouding the outcome of the fray in mystery.

Could it be that the colonel had overestimated the strategic strength of that position? Almost he expected to see the Sioux sweeping round the bend.

With his eyes visualizing an imaginary catastrophe, horrible and ghastly, he was for a moment a prey to indecision, and to the anxious inquiries from the front of the house he replied with an assurance which he was far from feeling. And it was with both relief and intensified apprehension that he heard screeches and yells resounding anew between the rocky walls. The defenders of the barricade still held the pass; but the firing in this second assault worked up to a crashing crescendo which resembled nothing so much as a boiler factory in full blast. Desperation spoke like a pleading voice in the very frenzy of the colonel's volleys.

His mind was no longer shaken by uncertainty. "Reckon they'll need a hand there!" he decided, and so he hastily conferred with Zeke and summoned three men, and with them he raced up the ringing canyon.

AT the barricade, following that first assault, old Gregory lay quiet and still. No more would his unobtrusive and kindly person dominate the background of the family gatherings; no more would he fit like an old and comfortable shoe into the scheme of their daily life.

"I never heard him say an unkind word about no one," Tuesday found time to murmur, with a half sob. He reverently closed the eyes.

"By gum, there'll be weepin' to pay for it, anyway, in the Sioux lodges!" Rocky declared, peering out between his sandbags. There in the foreground lay nine of the Hunkpapas.

"Shure, an' thot first rush was only a josh to wot the nixt will be," Dan murmured pregnantly.

This was obvious to all. The colonel was wounded in the cheek; blood streamed from Pat Alberson's left shoulder; the Prussian giant had been creased across the skull. And out there, behind the rocks, the Sioux were gathering for another rush.

"It'll be a close shave this trip, sure enough," Sudden echoed Dan. "But to hell with 'em!"

"Right!" snapped the colonel. "We're here first."

He looked fondly round about at his old cronies, among whom Rocky Moore, at sixty-five, was the youth. If they were to take the long trail into the mists, where the winds had long since blown the ashes of their many camp fires, what better moment could they have chosen for it? None that the colonel could think of. For one and all loved the younger members of their family dearly; and if they fell back to the main house, where added numbers would temporarily strengthen the defense, what of the ultimate outcome? The Sioux would be able to work nearer, through the canyon, and be in much better position for a short, decisive rush. All knew, too, that to retreat before an Indian for any cause is to feed his temperamental courage and thereby invite disaster.

"No," he repeated. "We're here first."

The others understood.

"Dot's right, sir," said old Krueger.

"Yis, sor," echoed Pat Alberson.

"Right you are, sir," Rocky Moore assented.

"Shure, an' thot's my sentiment, too, sor!" Dan exclaimed. And Bear-at-bay looked up and grunted: "How!" Whereupon the two young men sounded one another's misted eyes. They experienced before these leathery-cheeked veterans of the virgin West such a thrill as youth may feel when humbled by the spectacle of age rising sublimely above selfish, ineffectual senility.

Then they saw rifles belching flame once more from behind the rocks, and they heard the screeching Sioux and saw in the smoke the hordes of painted savages, charging down upon them. Ferociously they replied, and ferociously the battle raged and swelled, till the canyon seemed to rock under the shock of the reverberations.

Buck and his three companions raced that four hundred yards with hearts aflame. They knew this to be a crisis. Buck's quite proper departure from the main house had been fortunately timed. Smoke, like a blanket, lay over the barricade, and through it they saw red spurts of flame and indistinguishable forms of men, clubbing, yelling, and shooting.

Into this they flung themselves in the nick of time. Never had Buck worked a Winchester with greater rapidity. His companions' fire redoubled, also, at this close and murderous range, giving to the savages the impression that a dozen more had arrived.

There was a moment, then, when the fate of the Lone Star family hung in the balance. From the tail of his eye Buck saw the colonel brain a Sioux, and himself fall sidewise. Rocky Moore leaped before him, taking three shots in the breast; but he continued to work his Winchester, even as he sank slowly to his knees. The old cavalryman killed four Sioux on the sandbag ramparts before he sagged. Pat Alberson, grinning fixedly now, despite two gaping wounds, took a tomahawk blow in the side of the head, went down, staggered up, thrust a heavy Colt into a warrior's stomach, and fired as the tomahawk fell again. And the giant Krueger, streaming crimson, seized in his great hands the heads of

two Sioux warriors, bringing them together like clanging cymbals, before his huge body, shot in a dozen places, crashed to earth with the sound of a falling oak.

All this took place in those few critical seconds. Before the fire of the reinforcements, the attack then broke and disintegrated into fleeing remnants, which were hastened on their frantic way by a hail of whistling lead.

The day, for the time being, had been saved; but when the smoke cleared they saw the cost. There lay the colonel, Pat Alberson, old Rocky Moore, Bear-at-bay, Sergeant Krueger, and Straight Tongue Dan Mulcahey, inert and silent. For the thirty-two Sioux who lay dead before and on the sandbags, the veterans had apparently paid the final price.

A great sob wrenched Buck's frame, as he dropped to his knees and tenderly gathered Dan's slack form to his breast. Tuesday, examining the others, shook his head. They were undoubtedly dead. Dan's head was broken and wet, and when Buck fumbled for his pulse he could feel no movement there.

"I look at this and cry in my heart," he whispered brokenly.

"Wait a minute, ole-timer," Sudden kindly suggested, his own voice husky with sympathetic emotion. He pushed back Dan's eyelid; and, as though this were the open sesame, the old fellow stirred.

"Will yiz tell me," he whispered feebly, "did those spalpeens break me pipe?"

The half laugh, half sob this elicited seemed to further revive the Irishman. "No," he said, as he struggled feebly up and felt of his head. "'Twas not made to be cracked by the Sooz. Shure, I'll live to be ninety."

CHAPTER XLII.

BUCK RIDES OUT.

PPULLING himself together sharply, Buck then silently saluted the dead, and the cowboys, ever shy of demonstration, awkwardly followed suit.

"Men like them haven't died in vain out in this West," he said; and Dan and the five cow-punchers variously assented,

saying, "That's so," or "You bet yore life, pard," and shook hands awkwardly, without meeting one another's eyes. They then snapped back into full vigilance once more, their eyes grimly dilating. As they reloaded and peeked through the aperture in the sandbags, one flung up his rifle and killed a wounded Indian who had risen up for one last shot.

"I'll pull what the colonel had in mind if it went till night," Buck decided. This was to fire all buildings save the main house, furnishing light, and also depriving the Indians of an opportunity to obtain cover nearer the principal fortress. "I'll call in the boys. Then I'll send up three more."

"Keno!" cried Sudden. "We'll hold 'em with that many. Them Injuns won't come so fierce again next time, I'll gamble."

"All right. Then I'll ramble for Red Cloud," said Buck.

"Buck, yuh don't mean it!" Tuesday protested.

"Aw, he means to-night."

"No; this afternoon."

They all joined in protest, vowing that he would not get three hundred yards from the house. But all the while Buck remained adamant. He ran swiftly back to the house, followed by a few scattering bullets, and reached it unharmed. He did not tell the whole truth here. He answered the fearful questions in the women's eyes simply by stating that Bear-at-bay and old Gregory were dead. They, in turn, forbore to ask further details, sensing, perhaps, that he was sparing them the full brunt of the shock.

Matilda did not question him when he ordered the buildings fired. So the boys fired the outer buildings and came racing toward the main house, reaching it with only one minor wound; and, after three of them were sent, one by one, up the canyon, Buck disappeared into the cellar.

Here the colonel had caused several of the horses to be tied. They were saddled for a last emergency. Rapidly he went over Blacky's equipment, examining feet, cinches, and straps. He loosened

the latigo straps, lifted the Mexican stock saddle forward and back again, with the grain of the hair, carefully allowed three fingers' width of play for the withers, and once more tightened the cinches. All must be right for this ride.

His preparations completed, he hurried to the head of the stairs, and called Zeke. Shouting his intention, he ran down again, led Blacky out the rear door, and swiftly mounted before Zeke could more than protest verbally. He was around the corner and away before the women fully realized his purpose.

Theoretically he should not have cleared the house before being shot down. Some of the older Indians insist that he got a start because the Great Spirit made of horse and rider a ghostly pair through which bullets passed harmlessly. Others swear that the four winds combined to give their speed to the horse, because the Hunkpapas were wrong in making this attack.

But definite calculation took Buck directly toward that part of the Sioux circle wherein he knew the warriors to be most widely separated. It was the point farthest from their tethered ponies. These were now herded under the coulee bank. He also bestrode in perfect understanding a horse swifter than any he had thus far encountered; nor must we forget the element of surprise. The Indians never for one moment expected anything so apparently mad.

Adding to these favorable points was the fact that the smoke of the burning buildings now drifted in the still air. He broke through this like a thundering comet and was bearing down on the line almost before they realized it. The cowboys in the main house also rose to the emergency and poured a terrific burst of lead into the Sioux. Scattered as skirmishers, and never the best of shots, it is not likely that more than a dozen Indians remained cool enough at this juncture to take deliberate aim. Some ran at him and were shot down with his Colts; some streaked for their ponies and were struck by bullets from the house; and thus he won through the line. No bullets had wounded him, nor were there any rents in Blacky's sleek hide, nor any

signs at all of harm, save one partially severed rein, a hole in his hat, two in his clothing, and a lock missing from Blacky's mane.

AND of the fourscore Sioux who remained in that semicircle, only a score gave pursuit on their ponies. Between them and himself Buck had put a hundred yards before the first was mounted. During the next ten minutes, as the ground swam blurringly away beneath him, he gained at every jump. The Sioux bullets spanging into the dust only served to increase Blacky's speed. And frequently he dodged at baffling tangents behind protecting mesas or into draws. In this manner he increased his lead at every turn before the Sioux could again come within sight of him.

No sooner had he obtained a lead beyond effective rifle range than he gently reined in Blacky, lest the horse squander prematurely that reserve flash of energy so vitally necessary in emergency. He knew the tactics of his pursuers. They would oftentimes cruelly gash the hide of their mounts, rubbing gunpowder or the salt of the animals' sweat into the wounds, and then, with devilish heartlessness, flick at these raw spots whenever the horse flagged in his gait. But he also reasoned that they would not pursue him far. Already convinced that their ponies could not shorten the gap, they rode for a time only in hopes that he might fall. But they were disappointed even in that hope.

After twenty minutes of this, they finally gave up. Wheeling their ponies by the thongs wrapped around the under jaw, they turned back toward the spot where, under the Chalkeye Bluffs, the flaming buildings emitted billowing smoke.

He was free at last; but he still carried a fearful heart. The fight was by no means over. And, while he had not seen either man, he had caught a glimpse of Snow's white-faced broncho in the coulee near the house, and he knew that both his ancient enemies were there. Even if vengeance for their dead failed to spur the Hunkpapas on to further supreme risks, Buck knew that Snow

would now leave no stone unturned to urge them on.

"The Smiler has an 'out' because Bear-at-bay ambushed him, in case his part gets to the authorities," Buck reflected. "Snow reckons no white man knows or can prove he was there. He'll offer the Sioux any amount o' new ammunition, free, to finish this job. This is the show-down." And his teeth rubbed together. "I'll kill 'em out o' hand, though, if I pull through this," he promised himself grimly.

Assured that the defenders, with their ample ammunition, would hold out against anything but fire—and there was no wind to blow the sparks from the burning structures—he galloped on into the northwest. When he neared the edge of the creeping mountain shadows, the easy pitches and swells of the prairies, similar to the smooth movements of a cantering horse, gave way to sharper, broken erosions, as though the gait of formation had suddenly become that of a bucking broncho. Here the earth's bosom was broken by flat-topped mounds and winding strings of ridges, separated by yellow flats of sand, lifeless and glinting, like the surface of a tin roof at noon. But these gave way presently to swales and slopes, where tall, rich grasses plentifully grew, and waters, still sweet with the tang of mountain snow, revived both panting horse and master; and, as though his arrival out of the recent barrenness into this realm of fertility were an omen of imminent good fortune, he mounted a ridge and sighted a large band of Indians. They were speeding down from a far-off pass in the mountains.

Reasonably sure that they were Red Cloud's Ogallalas, he waited to be certain, loosening Blacky's cinches and allowing him to blow, till the Indians ate up the greater part of the two miles or more which intervened between them. Doubt then no longer worried him. Before they had started down the side of the opposite ridge, he saw that they were Ogallalas, not in war paint, with Red Cloud in the lead. Another party followed, a mile or more in the rear.

"Ho, *mita koda!*" cried Red Cloud. "We saw the smoke and saw a rider com-

ing. Then I felt the beating of your heart through the hands I placed once on my heart. Speak!"

Red Cloud said not a word, as Buck bravely explained; but his clear eyes never left those of his friend. While his crowding warriors grunted in amazement and admiration over the cow-puncher's exploit, or exchanged guttural asides, deploring the death of their Sioux cousins, sadness and bitterness sat stronger and ever stronger upon the deeply carved face of the fierce chieftain. Yet when Buck was wholly finished, he simply pointed forward, in the direction of the ranch, and started on. Buck wheeled with him, and the two hundred or more warriors trailed along behind.

FOR a time Red Cloud remained deep in thought. The situation weighed heavily upon him. "Tears flow in my heart," he muttered once. Then, raising his voice, he looked at Buck with a strange intensity and exclaimed: "It is an example of what the Great White Father told me when I was in the big white house, where the trails are hot. The Indians and the white man stare at one another through a veil. Many clashes have come through mistakes."

"Do you believe, then, that Bear-at-bay did not shoot Son-of-bear?"

Red Cloud answered with a slow nod in the affirmative. For a time his head hung on his breast, as his body easily took the swing of the pony. But presently he looked up once more, his eyes grave in retrospect. "When a man uses a skunk to help him, how can he expect to escape some of the odor?" he asked now.

Buck failed to get all the chief's meaning.

"I speak of the man, Coyote Grin," Red Cloud explained. And while the chief did not say so, Buck knew that he was thinking of the rifle sales. "I have reason to believe he *might* have shot Son-of-bear," Red Cloud resumed. "But when Rose-dawn comes she will speak."

"Rose-dawn?" cried Buck.

"She was bathing when I got word of the smoke. She follows."

Beyond this the chief made no fur-

ther comment, and Buck forbore to press him, knowing the Indian's taciturnity. But fierce elation burned in his heart. The Indian visage was grim and dour, and whatever Rose-dawn had told Red Cloud presaged ill for The Smiler.

They settled down now to a steady canter, which was increased as the sun, in a blaze of color, went down behind the mountain, and occasional views of the distant ranch showed the long-burning logs gleaming with an ever-deepening red against the growing dusk. Coming closer still, they also saw that which caused Buck's heart to leap with joy. It was the flash of the rifle fire through the dark veil which now softly blotted out the last of the sunset reds. Seeing these, Red Cloud grunted an order to increase the speed, and they did so, but in silence.

"They have not seen us," Red Cloud reasoned. "We were too far back while it was light." And later, when they were within a mile of the ranch, he surprised Buck by calling a halt and grunting some orders which the cow-puncher could not overhear. Two parties immediately separated themselves from the others, one riding to southwestward, and the other, a much larger force, in the direction of the Bar N Ranch.

Surely, he thought, Red Cloud did not intend to attack his own people! What, then, did he contemplate? But the explanation, he saw, must wait.

So the remainder, with Red Cloud and Buck, then bore directly down on the ranch, through the darkness which had now wholly fallen. They kept silence till they had come within a quarter of a mile, when all began to yell. This brought answering yells from the Hunkpapas. Their firing ceased; calls were soon exchanged across the narrowing space; and Red Cloud, bidding his friend remain a moment with his warriors in the background, lest the excited Hunkpapas act hastily, went forward to where some of the attacking force were roasting a steer, under the banks of the twisting couleé. This group Buck took in quickly and looked anxiously past them toward the house. He noted that Snow and The Smiler were not now with the Indians.

Rain-in-the-face, it developed, had withdrawn his forces from the canyon and had been waiting till the fires died down before ordering an attack, under cover of complete darkness. Red Cloud spoke to the younger chieftain in words that Buck could not hear, though in the firelight he could see the dark-eyed Hunkpapas darting glances out toward him; and then Red Cloud called out, and his party went forward.

THE Hunkpapas crowded all around, still far from amicable, yet eying him with admiration and respect; and they exclaimed gutturally, one to another, till Rain-in-the-face held up his hand and turned to Red Cloud.

"I had no war with these people if they had given up Bear-at-bay!" he protested angrily.

"Ho!" echoed a dozen Hunkpapas. And they looked meaningly at one another, as much as to say indignantly: "Let the Great Mystery judge if we were not in the right!"

But Red Cloud said calmly: "When I visited these people they did not throw me a bone, as to a dog, but treated me as a man. When my child was sick, they kept it here and nursed it. When their word was given it was kept."

"We kept ours, too. We did not kill their cattle till to-day."

"But to-day you took the word of Coyote Grin and Skull Face."

"As against the word of Bear-at-bay, yes."

"So!" retorted Red Cloud. "And they ran off when they heard us yelling."

Rain-in-the-face glanced out of the corner of his eye at Buck. "They were not here," he lied deliberately, to protect his allies.

"They were here and will soon be back," Red Cloud predicted. And Buck knew now why the parties had been sent out by the shrewd Ogallala. For Snow and The Smiler had decamped when they heard the Ogallalas coming, not wishing to be caught there, in case Red Cloud really intended to intervene.

Red Cloud then whispered something in the ear of Rain-in-the-face. That usually expressionless warrior started in-

credulously, after which the hue of rage spread over his face.

"Huh!" he grunted, with an evil, glittering light in his dilated eyes. He searched the darkness into which his two allies had fled. Turning back then to Buck, he gruffly asked him to call on his friends for a parley.

With infinite relief, Buck did so. What portended he could not quite foresee, but he had been burning with anxiety to know how his friends had fared. And now, in answer to his hail, a yell went up which he remembered ever afterward.

"And we're all here yet!" roared Zeke, his voice shaking with tears of joyous relief. "Oh, *you Buck!*"

CHAPTER XLIII.

BROADER AND BROADER.

AS this answer came ringing across the ranch, the Ogallala scouting party, which had scattered to eastward, now returned, bringing with them Snow and The Smiler, disarmed and closely guarded.

Both men were now extremely pallid and nervous. The whites of their darting eyes gleamed oddly in the firelight. When they sighted Rain-in-the-face, they began a frantic protest; but that warrior bent upon them a look so venomous that both recoiled. He stood for a second with arms folded, boring into them with blazing eyes; and then, with a contemptuous gesture, he told his own warriors to seize them and lead them up the slope.

"But I—ah—have a right to know what this is about!" Snow wailed, trying to hang back and looking at Buck.

"I reckon you're due to find out!" was Buck's unsympathetic retort, as the Indians jerked the men forward.

Following the Sioux up the slope to where the flickering light from the ruins weirdly played over the arc before the main house, Buck winced when his friends cheered him anew. He saw Matilda at a porthole, pale and anxious, but averted his eyes; for now that his friends were saved, he heard in the sage the sound of galloping hoofs, and he saw in

the gloom more Indians approaching, and he knew that Rose-dawn would soon be among them. Despondency dragged at his footsteps. What was there in the world for him now? This thing called love had ambushed him and carried his heart one way, while his feet perforce must travel another.

Red Cloud, addressing Zeke as spokesman for the defenders, now told him simply that they had a brief trial to conduct before the parley and wished them to listen. He then waved his hand toward Rose-dawn, who shortly came riding out of the darkness.

"*Ai-yai, ai-yai!*" both Ogallalas and Hunkpapas chanted; but beyond this brief salute to the medicine woman there was no other sound; and silence, tense and portentous, clamped down upon the surroundings.

Rose-dawn quietly dismounted and walked slowly into the center of the semicircle. Her gaze was fixed on the apprehensive prisoners. Only once did her eyes leave them, and then only to look at Buck for one fleeting instant, as a shipwrecked mariner looks at an approaching sail. That brief passage over, her black eyes once more transfixed The Smiler.

Holding a dramatic silence still—and what Indian does not love theatricals?—she halted at last, close to them. Her captivity had not affected her health. More strikingly handsome she certainly was, now, than she had been in her teens. But on her aquiline features was stamped the tragic toll of bitter contemplation in the mountain solitudes; and, in all his dealings with Indians, Buck had never seen an expression more implacable than that which now confronted the prisoners.

Before it they shuffled uneasily, wetting their lips, till at last The Smiler's eyes queerly dilated, while the corners of his mouth dropped scornfully.

"Well," he sneered, with an attempt at a disdainful laugh, "what's the game? Yuh look like a gypsy fortune teller!"

"So you want to know the game?" the Indian woman slowly said. Her English was now rusty and queerly accented. "You are to know. Where is Gray Squirrel?"

"Off visitin' her relations, I suppose, on the reservation."

"She was till we got her yesterday. You must know I would remember that Gray Squirrel sent me out, years ago, to see my man. To-day she talked. She knows that you plan to get rid of her as Snow did his squaw."

From the giant's face every drop of color now drained precipitately.

"I don't know what yuh mean!"

"You sold me to the Gros Ventres—that's what I mean," she replied in Siouan.

AN ugly, ominous murmur broke from the Indians and died, like thunder on a far-off horizon. And now Snow seized eagerly an apparent opportunity to save his own life.

"He did just that!" he shouted. "He——"

The Smiler bellowed like a mad bull, and with all his strength aimed a fearful blow at his treacherous mate; but several warriors gripped him; and while he shouted accusations at Snow, declaring that he had evidence to prove the former Mormon guilty of young Busbee's murder, they securely bound his arms.

"He shot Son-of-bear, too!" Snow babbled in terror. "He—ah—told me so, no less than an hour ago."

A savage cry broke from the listeners in the house, and Dan Mulcahey sobbed out a bitter imprecation. When eagerly translated, it wrung from the Sioux another chorus of throaty murmurs. Red Cloud turned triumphantly to Rain-in-the-face.

"See?" he grunted.

Chagrin and remorse chased themselves across Rain-in-the-face's features, followed by an expression of demoniacal rage. His eyes glittered like points of evil fire.

"Ha!" he ejaculated, with a world of prophetic meaning. "Ha!"

"By the Eternal, Snow don't get away with that!" gasped The Smiler. "He blew up that dam. He was behind every——"

"Save your breath for your screams!" Rose-dawn cut in. She turned toward

Buck. "Every crooked, shadowy trail must some day come out in sunlight," she said. Her eyes again took in Snow. "Is not that so?" she asked him. "Wasn't Smiler the man who killed Buck's father and mother, years ago?"

"He was, the murdering cutthroat!" Snow eagerly replied.

Rose-dawn smiled mirthlessly.

"Thanks!" she dryly said.

"Then surely you are—ah—not going to hold me?" Snow fearfully pleaded.

Again Rose-dawn laughed mirthlessly.

"Well, not too long in *this* world," she assured him with acidulous sweetness. "We know you two were hand in glove."

This wrung from Snow an incoherent outburst so craven that Buck turned from the picture in shame. The wretch ceased only when Rain-in-the-face made a suggestive gesture with his knife. He and his sister then conferred in whispers for a second, and at a suggestion of hers there spread over the face of the young chieftain a hideous smile. Rose-dawn next stepped forward before The Smiler.

"We may give you a choice," she said aloud, and, bending, whispered something which only the prisoners and the surrounding Indians caught.

Such a scream of terror as Buck had never heard rent the air. It came from Snow. His captors promptly choked him into quiet and gagged him. The shaking Smiler seemed momentarily stunned by fear. But when he exploded into speech, it was to gasp: "For pity's sake, burn us at the stake!"

An instant later found him also gagged.

WHAT horrible torture the Hunk-papas contemplated, Buck could only guess. What it was, no white man save the victims would learn. For several Indians, at a gesture from Rain-in-the-face, started to drag the struggling men away into the dark.

And what, Buck asked himself, had he to do with this? Had they not brought it on themselves? And what sweeter vengeance could he himself have wished than this? That which they had to endure before death released them was

so infinitely more terrible than anything his own hand could possibly have dealt them.

Yet now a revulsion of feeling shook the cow-puncher. He had been staring at Rose-dawn as one fascinated; but in his eyes now blazed the gladness of a man who suddenly sees the light after years of darkness. Face to face with the reality, he had seen the utter senselessness in attempting to right one wrong by perpetrating another, and from his mind he cast forever the smoldering dregs of hate. With an arresting gesture he took a pace toward Rose-dawn.

"Please ask them to wait a minute," he requested.

Wonderingly she did so, turning back immediately with a startled question in her eyes.

"Is there anything that could induce you to let these men off?" Buck asked.

"Oh, bravo!" Matilda breathed from her porthole.

Incredulity made Rose-dawn's face ludicrous for an instant.

"*You* ask that?" she gasped. "Knowing that they killed your people, you ask that?"

"To let them off from torture, yes. Killin' is due them, but not torture."

Rose-dawn continued to stare in unbelief for a minute, but presently slowly stiffened and raised her dark head.

"Surely you do not know what you ask!" she declared. And she translated to the listening Indians, who broke out in amazement and scorn. "Something has changed your heart to that of a sage hen," she went on in English, darting an apprehensive look from his features to those of Matilda.

For a space Buck returned her glance with eyes remote and almost impersonal, as if he saw her merely as part of a picture within his mind. Yet, while he retained no longer any single trailing feeling of doubt, and knew definitely where his path must lead, an instinctive understanding of the Indian called forth his deepest sympathy for an attitude which his reason now condemned. That sympathy begat sadness which weighed in upon him and softened his expression and tone to that of infinite compassion,

even while his decision remained unshaken.

"There's something in you, I suppose, that won't let you give up that vengeance?" he asked slowly in his soft and caressing drawl.

"Yes!" she fiercely replied, yet aggrievedly, too. She clamped a hand over her heart. "This tells me it is fair and just that I take full vengeance."

"If you say the word, though, they'll not torture them."

"I know that. I can make medicine against it."

From her he turned appealingly to Red Cloud. "I have made only one request of my friend——" he began.

"I know what you would ask," Red Cloud interrupted hastily, with a helpless gesture. Sadly, but sternly, he shook his head. "This I cannot grant. The Hunkpapas have the prisoners, not I."

Buck thereupon once again regarded Rose-dawn sadly and thoughtfully, while she fearfully probed his eyes. Motionless they stood there, in a surcharged silence, unconscious of their audience, looking at one another across a widening gulf in this, their natural theater, the dome of which was a star-spangled canopy spreading over all the mountain world. Yes, he understood now. There are moments when life, with its illogical impulses and shifting moods and counter-emotions, ceases to be a maze of complexities, and an unsuspected light from within pierces through the fog to the portals of Truth. He very clearly saw that this Indian girl before him was not a young woman in her late twenties, but a being two thousand, four thousand—yes, countless years old. Hers was an heredity of changeless traditions. She personified the strongest characteristics of her race. Beside the delicate rainbow in her character color scheme, there ran a crude streak of a darker nature.

AND through her veins coursed the fierce, proud strain from a line of chiefs—chiefs who, in not one single instance, had been allowed to rule by right of heredity, but only by right of individual superiority in endurance, forti-

tude, and feats in the field. She was generous; she was tender to those she loved; she was sweet and appealing and high-hearted in her yearnings: but one could no more influence her to renounce personal vengeance than could Canute with his stern command stop the advancing tide. These men had sold her to the Gros Ventres, robbing her of freedom and her chance to hold the man upon whom her heart had set its choice. And one might have cut her into ribbons, bit by bit and inch by inch, and never have wrung from her a promise of leniency to the victims.

"Rose-dawn," said Buck then, speaking ever gently and sorrowfully, "I can't blame you in my heart for what you are going to do. It isn't that. Why, not so long ago I would have done the same thing myself. Yes, gladly. And I sure like you a lot. But I see something now—see it clear as day."

"What do you see?"

"What you propose to do is savagery an' ignorance," he asserted, with a deep impersonality underlying his tones. "I see that now, as though it was a picture unrolled before me."

She winced a little and trembled, but held her head ever more proudly. "Savagery it undoubtedly is," she retorted. "But it is strong and without deceit, and I am proud to be that sort of savage. As for ignorance, I will not grant that your race has the monopoly on intelligence, of which they boast."

"Still, that sort of savagery which can't change, which can't soften—that's the big difference between the red man and the white."

"Faugh! I suppose red men were responsible for Mountain Meadows?"

"That was only *some* white men. Oh, I know this white race is still a sight closer to savagery than some pretend to be. But they're getting farther away from savagery with each generation. Gentiles and Mormons are starting to bury the hatchet in Salt Lake City right now. But the red man thinks and lives like father, like son, from one generation to another. And that sort o' thing has got to die from the earth."

"Why?"

"Because, whether you call it God or whether you call it the Great Mystery, we were put here to *get* somewhere. An' we don't get anywhere runnin' round in one little circle."

Her lip curled a little, while out on the prairies a coyote howled long and funereally, and rays from the dying embers were thrown up fitfully now and again to be reflected in odd gyrations upon the sheer Chalkeye Cliffs.

"There's a *meanin'* to all this push an' turmoil we whites are gripped in," he said. "I remember once you said one white man builds an engine. He doesn't. We *all* build it."

"All?"

"Yes. He soaks up a *suggestion* from somethin' that's been worked out by some one else before him, an' from that he gets further ideas. That engine was just as possible five thousand years ago as it is to-day. The same laws that made it work now would have made it work then. But folks were livin' then pretty near the way your people are now."

"Well?"

"Why, there wasn't much to stir up the desire for more things, and so bring on trade, and make men think."

Again he paused and held her with his solemn eyes. Then he resumed: "When men *had* to think o' new ways to get things, they hit on designs to do it easier an' quicker, an' one thing suggested another. So the whites started to get somewhere. Just where they're gettin' no one knows yet. But I can say this: The answer is there!" And he pointed into cosmos.

"Well, doesn't the Indian know that?"

"Yes. He knows the answer is there, but he's content to *leave* it there. But those among the whites that think know it's only goin' to be answered when we work it out. An' our way, with all its evils, is headin', at least, toward that. For it stimulates thought, an' the answer to this riddle isn't goin' to be worked out in ignorance."

Slowly the Indian woman digested this, till finally she put her fate to the last definite touch and asked: "What has that to do now, with this situation—and with us two?"

Buck's hands closed tightly. He hated what he had to say, but had no recourse.

"It's because you can't see it that I don't feel under any further bond to you, Rose-dawn."

"Bond?" she gasped. "Do you feel tied to me—against your will?"

"Yes," he forced out. "It's just that I've changed—that I can't see eye to eye with you any more. Things can't be the same for you an' me."

She took but a second to read the finality in his eyes, and rage unutterable blazed from her own. With a choked imprecation she whipped a knife from her deerskin blouse.

But from the house a clear, firm voice spoke sharply. Rose-dawn's eyes turned aside to see Matilda leveling a rifle at her breast; and Red Cloud also hurled himself into the breach. Pushing back the enraged girl, he declared: "Do what you will to your prisoners, but make no move toward these people. Justice is justice. Red Cloud has spoken."

The Hunkpapas, therefore, crowded closer to draw Rose-dawn aside, and Rain-in-the-face grunted an order. Rose-dawn paused a moment and looked beseechingly at Buck, while anger faded from her countenance, and pathos took its place. She seemed for a second about to ask whether, if she gave over torturing her prisoners, he would change his word and take her back into his heart. But this she considered only for a brief instant. She would have died cheerfully for this youth; but not for anything conceivable in this life would she have yielded one jot in carrying out that which to her was not merely an "exaction of payment" for her wrongs, but loyalty to a sacred principle. Her head came up again, and with one last look into his eyes she turned and faded into the night and out of his life, taking with her the grim Hunkpapas and the prisoners who would have preferred the fire and stake to that which awaited them.

WHEN opportunity came to them later, Buck and Matilda rode side by side on one of the Chalkeye trails. It had needed but a glance into Matilda's

eyes to take forever from his heart the aches which thought of her had placed there. So they continued through the unsullied moonlight, eventually mounting the slopes and rifts till the prairies behind them were no longer to be seen.

They were silent, as people frequently are in that unmeasured world. They foresaw the rush of February, '76, after the government had said, in effect, that it was powerless to keep prospectors out of the Black Hills; and though this was to bring financial security for themselves, they also foresaw the defeat of the Sioux and their ousting from the last stronghold. This, with their bereavement, gave them the expressions of people whose happiness must always be tainted by a little sadness.

By mutual consent they stopped at a high point from which they could look down on the ranch and that chasm where the veterans had so gallantly died that others might live and carry on. And here they clung silently together for a moment.

Buck spoke first.

"I wonder if you see what I see?" he whispered presently.

Matilda nodded in that rare telepathy which some lovers know. For both were looking now at the trail which came up out of the chasm. It led across the basin, and thence upward over a ridge, and downward into a vale, and up once more, ever winding higher, ever growing narrower, till it disappeared between the two twin spires. Beyond them floated the nebulous, sun-kissed clouds. Into these, in the eyes of the two lovers, the earth trail seemed to extend. And on the trail they saw the transparent shapes of oxen and prairie schooners, and beside the wagons ghostly horses, and on the horses the spectral forms of mounted men. Gold miners were there, and Mormons, with lurching stagecoaches and Indian warriors, constantly mounting higher, constantly traveling farther toward the space where the rainbow begins.

Among them they saw his father, resplendent in deerskin and hawk's bells, and hers, in his romantic cowboy chaps;

and there rode, also, the flat-backed colonel and his gallant companions, with old Bear-at-bay in his trailing war bonnet. And, as one by one, they passed between the peaks and faded softly into the yesterdays which the West can never know again, each turned in his saddle and silently waved a kindly hand.

"They didn't die for nothing," Buck whispered.

"No, dear," Matilda softly replied.

And then he stirred, with a long, long sigh. "But they wouldn't want us to grieve over them, I know," said he. "They're telling us to keep on making the trail broader and broader."

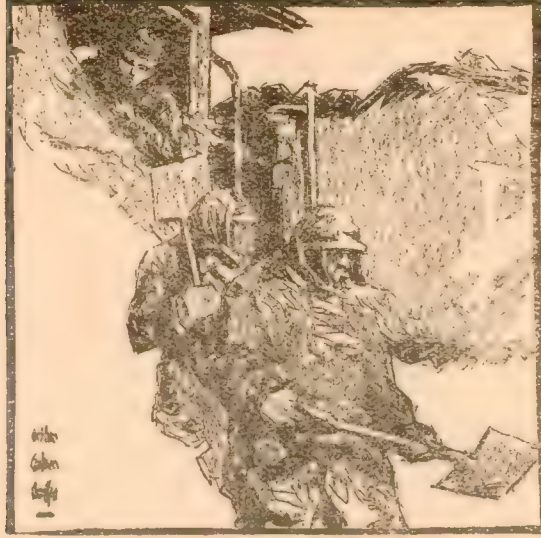
THE END.

THE NEW VOCABULARY

IT has been said, with some show of reason, that the practice of using big words for little things began with Doctor Johnson. We suspect, however, that it antedates the Litchfield lexicographer by several centuries. It has its roots in human vanity. In spite of our modern protest against Victorian delicacy in the matter of words—our pride in calling a spade a spade, and throwing in as many spades as a sentence will carry—there is one exception. Boldly we speak of sex and morals in our modern novels, but in regard to the minor unpleasantnesses of the human body we have adopted a highly technical vocabulary which successfully conceals the simple, if unpleasant, ailments. You may suffer from halitosis, but not from a bad breath; you must not mention baldness but alopecia. A sty in the eye was something your grandfather might have had; we suffer from conjunctivitis. You can no longer earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, though there was good Scriptural warrant for the habit, but you suffer with perspiration. Dogs no longer are pestered with fleas but have a case of pediculosis, as the wrapper on any good soap for this dog malady will inform you. The adoption of these imposing names for simple maladies is another indication of the childish ways of human vanity.

THE BEE FINDS A BIOGRAPHER

THE industrious bee has fallen into the clutches of a modern biographer. When Lytton Strachey started to pull the sawdust out of the stuffy Victorians, he set an example which, in the hands of less expert writers, has begotten a whole school of ungentle and rather malicious biographers. Some of them have come to grief in the courts, like Captain Wright, who had to withdraw his insinuations against Gladstone. Monsieur Millet, a French scientist, has just written a study of the life and habits of the bee. Now, it would appear that all the fine qualities which we have always associated with the bee—his industry, his intelligence, and his altruism have no foundation in fact, for the bee is not what we thought he was. In truth, the bee is no better than he should be. No longer can he be held up to lazy little boys as an exemplar of industry and the virtues of thrift. If Monsieur Millet is to be believed, he is a honey-grubbing materialist to whom an old shoe is just as attractive as a yellow jonquil, if the shoe conceals a bit of sugar. In fact, the lilies of the field are no more delectable in his eyes than the artificial flowers in a flamboyant night club, if the artificial flowers have been artificially perfumed. These disconcerting secrets of the life of the bee are no doubt true, for Monsieur Millet is a scientist, with no private malice to gratify. But they are rather hard on the copy-book makers. Many a compiler of school readers will find himself at a loss for a proper simile to impress the young mind with the need to "improve each shining hour."



A Very Special Case

By Allison W. Ind

Author of "That Blasted Idiot," Etc.

"Carrots" Perrin hungered for the kaleidoscopic life of the railroad yards. He had been born to it. As a boy, they had driven him away from it, but he had promised to return some day and show them all. And Carrots kept his word.

EVERY living soul in Cascade Junction that was old enough to know anything, knew of "Carrots" Perrin by the time Carrots had flagged his sixth milestone. And, being thus forewarned, took the precaution to be forearmed. They desired any more information of him to be other than firsthand, for Carrots was probably the most all-around cussedly pack of heat-treated, casehardened trouble that ever breathed the smoky air of the Junction.

But it wasn't possible for every one to avoid Carrots; especially the railroad men, for Carrots had selected the yards and everything in them, from the Gap on the west to the Fire Valley on the east, as his stamping ground.

That selection wasn't altogether up to Carrots; he had to do it that way; something inside him made him do it. He could no more stay away from the railroad yards than he could stay away from

a good meal when his little stomach howled for something to fill it.

It was in his blood. Carrots' father, who died when Carrots was four years old, pulled a throttle when Cascade Junction was only a single row of frame buildings, with a dozen or so tar shacks on either side, and a low, one-story structure stood where the brick headquarters building is to-day. And his father before him piloted his little "teakettle" along the plains, over one of the first regular runs west of Omaha. Well, maybe it wasn't exactly inherited, as the scientists would have it, but it was in his blood, all the same.

He hopped the footboards of panting switch engines; he hung like a monkey from the steel ladders of moving cars, his head thrown back, and his red hair blowing in the wind. He was at home in the cab of anything, from the meanest yard shunter to the latest things in high-

driverr passenger pullers. Night or day, it was all the same to Carrots—the smoke and the dirt—the cinders and the soot. He filled his lungs with it and gloried in the thought, for it was in his blood.

Sometimes he would scale the fence back of the freight house and on the top make connections with the drain pipe. From the windows of the dispatcher's office, they could see his little figure straddling the peak of the roof. One hour, two, three, and sometimes four, he would sit there, hardly moving. A wonderful place up there. It was all around him—the noise and dirt and smoke.

But there were days when Carrots wasn't content to sit and watch, for the time came when Carrots decided he wanted a job—any job, so long as it was on the railroad. Only the division super escaped his everlasting teasing for a job. For some reason Carrots failed to make a regular stop in front of the glass door in the headquarters building. Everybody else suffered, and one in particular. That was Akerman, the big master mechanic over at the roundhouse. Regardless of whatever else happened, Akerman could be sure that he would have at least one employment problem to settle before the day was out. "Gimme a job, Mr. Akerman," got to be a part of the master mechanic's work or rest, eat, sleep and drink.

At first Akerman merely shooed Carrots away, but it wasn't long before shooing was about as effective as wishing him away. It couldn't be done. Then one day, after the usual request, Akerman leaned against a steel pillar in the roundhouse and looked his applicant over.

"What kind of a job?" he demanded.

"I wanna be an engineer!" declared Carrots, jerking his colorful head in the direction of a ten-wheeler purring under a banked fire.

"When?"

"Now!"

Akerman opened his eyes a bit at that. "Would you just as soon do a few things first?" he asked of the ambitious mite of humanity before him.

"What kinda things?"

"Well, now suppose you learn how to wipe down an engine, Carrots. I'm kinda

short of engines right now, so I'll have to put you on the waiting list for one. Is that all right?"

Carrots considered. It was the closest he had ever come to a job. Maybe if he handled this thing right, he'd land a throttle after all.

"Start now?" he asked.

"Any time," replied Akerman.

SO Carrots began his railroad career at the age of eight and began it as many a good man had before him, wiping engines. He worked hard. It thrilled him to walk along the running board and lean against the big-bellied boilers. It filled him with delight to sit up on the engineer's cushion and, by putting all his strength into it, unlatch the throttle of a dead engine and open it a few notches. He turned this valve and that; pushed the Westinghouse release a bit, but the hiss of air scared him, and he left it alone. He even tried to throw the Johnson bar and found that it took a bigger man than he was.

But an evil day was at hand. Akerman had spotted him poking among the vitals of a safety valve with a screw driver.

"Hey! What're you doin' up there!" he roared, as he saw his youthful wiper sitting on top the boiler of a freight engine.

"Nothin'."

"Did you touch that pop valve?" Akerman demanded with visions of having to run a cold water test on the whole engine before he could put another fire under it again.

"I didn't hurt it," said Carrots, preparing to climb down.

But Akerman wasn't so sure.

"I guess I'll put you where you won't get into so much trouble. Go into the boiler house and tell Olsen to put you to work."

Olsen knew Carrots of old. He was glad enough when, after Carrots had made a general nuisance of himself for two days, he saw Carrots sitting in a little sheet-ironed shed back of the main boiler house, much interested in an empty, five-gallon gasoline can.

Carrots had decided to have a boiler

of his own. He filled the can half full of water and screwed the cap tight. Then he punched a small hole near an upper corner and laid the can lengthwise on a fire box of old bricks, pried from the wall of the coal bin. Soon the oil-soaked waste set the water to boiling, and a fine jet of steam hissed from the hole near the top. That was fine. All he lacked was a few drivers and rods to have a locomotive of his own. As he watched, the fire burned low.

"I'll show you how to keep steam up, boy!" he muttered to himself, as he threw piece after piece of greasy waste into his fire box. The flames crackled and roared. The steam whistled shrilly from the hole. He put in more waste. The can snapped and bulged outward. More waste—another snap. Then something seemed to clog the hole. The steam sputtered, the fine jet shrank in size.

"I'll blow you out!" he declared, reaching for more waste.

Carrots ought to have said "up," for, as he turned to get the waste, the air was suddenly filled with flying gobs of fire, searing steam, and a most terrible roar. Pieces of brick, splinters of metal, and a sheet of scalding water descended from somewhere.

Olsen managed to whip his jumper around Carrots and smother the flame that licked up the back of his shirt. Then, while the men came running from the roundhouse, he turned the hand extinguisher on the shed.

And Carrots' railroad career was thus early terminated, for immediately after the fire Carrots and Akerman got together—too much so for Carrots' good.

As the master mechanic gave the would-be engineman a one-day clearance out of the yard, he added as a further impression: "And if I ever catch you foolin' with any of this company's stuff again, I'll boost you so hard you'll have to wear the same pants the rest of your life! Git!"

And Carrots "got."

IT wasn't long after that when Carrots' mother fell sick with pneumonia and died. The brotherhood took charge of things for a while. But Carrots was a

charge no one wanted to assume for long. So the secretary wired here and there, and finally located a maiden aunt down in the Nebraska sand flats, who offered to take Carrots under her wing if the brotherhood could arrange for his freight charges from the Junction.

Martin was handling the division at the time, and Martin acted with more than ordinary promptness to put through a pass account for the only, but very much living, member of the house of Perrin. Not that Martin felt that the pass bureau needed a prod at that particular time, but this was a special case—a very special case.

The only difficulty with the whole thing was that they reckoned without Carrots. Martin got the pass ready and sent for him. It was easy to send for him, any one could do that, but it took more than the division super to get Carrots, if he didn't want to be got. And Carrots didn't want to be.

The trouble was that Carrots liked Cascade Junction—liked it better than most any place he could think of. As for Nebraska—Carrots' mind was made up on that point.

Martin had already wired the aunt that she might expect Carrots on the Omaha train the following noon. It was up to Martin to find Carrots. So the yardmen watched for him on the cars, the shopmen looked for him under the benches, and the freight handlers searched the storehouse. It shouldn't go down against Martin that, fifteen minutes before the arrival time of the Omaha train, the super took Carrots' name in vain and reached for his hat to do a little searching himself.

But Martin didn't get far; not even to the door; for, as Martin turned to leave, there was a sudden sharp crack and a shower of plaster. Through the dust, Martin could see a short leg hoisted up between the dangling laths. Again Martin spoke fervently and took immediate steps to prevent further disastrous results to the ceiling by removing the cause.

Martin sent a call boy after Carrots' clothes, dressed him, washed him, combed him, and then stood him up for inspection amid the ruin he had wrought.

"There!" said Martin with a satisfied sigh. "I guess Finigen'll let you ride on his train."

The object of his labors favored him with a scowl that was more than black—it was purplish black.

"I don't wanna ride on Finigen's train!" He emphasized his words with a savage kick at Martin's wastebasket.

Martin moved the basket out of range, then thought better of it, and put it back. There were more valuable things than wastebaskets within range, which couldn't be moved so easily.

"What's the matter with that train?"

"Nothin'." Kick!

"Then why don't you want to ride on it?"

"I don't want to ride on *no* trains a-tall!" Kick!

"Well, son, you won't be troubled with trains where you're going. There aren't any within ten miles of your aunt's house."

Now, Martin could size up a man and never make a mistake. Maybe he could hold down the toughest division between the Mississippi and the Pacific and never make a blunder. But Carrots was a special case. It was soon evident that Martin couldn't have said anything worse if he'd laid awake nights for a month, planning it.

Carrots uncoupled his foot from the wreck of the wastebasket. He stood still, his eyes wide. The freckles on his face collected into patches, and his mouth opened to an alarming extent. For a moment there was no sound. Then it came. The boys downstairs mistook it for the roundhouse siren. It would have put any Sioux war whoop in the whisper class—that little protest that Carrots managed to utter.

From the flow that followed, Martin gathered that Carrots wanted to be a railroad man; wanted to be a railroad man with all the fiery intentness of his wild little heart. And there was no place in all the world like Cascade Junction for a railroad man. The roundhouse, the shops, the yards, and the big mountain-type pullers.

For a moment Martin wondered if he was doing the right thing. It was only a

moment though. The Omaha train, coasting to a stop on track No. 3, helped him make up his mind.

Kicking and struggling, Martin got Carrots onto the last car and put him in the tender care of the rear-end trainman. The super muttered something about quick and sudden death, if for any reason the trainman failed to deliver his special lading to the Nebraska destination.

As Finigan's string of sleepers commenced to tap the joints softly, Martin saw the trainman standing on the rear platform, holding his flags with one hand and a weeping, red-headed youngster with the other.

Through the tears he heard a heart-broken sob!

"I'm comin' back, Mr. Martin—some day."

And, as the Omaha train grew smaller, while it gathered speed down east yard, Martin could hear again that heart-broken sob: "I'm comin' back again, Mr. Martin—some day."

THAT all happened ten years ago. Somehow, things on the Hills Division seemed to struggle along after Carrots left, much the same as they had before, except a bit more peaceful, maybe. There were a few changes, as the years went on—new names added to the pay roll, old ones, higher up; the stockyards fire and the building of the new shops. Then there was that fine bit of engineering up in the Snake Range country—the Snake Range Tunnel that twisted through the base of Hidden Fortune Peak. It was a fine job, all right, and, what was more important to the operating men, it cut out twelve miles of line, two bad pulls, and about three hundred degrees of curvature.

But to think of the Snake Range Tunnel was to think of Andy Grams. Andy gave the boys their clearance slips from his little red shanty at the far end of the bore, known on the time-table as West Portal. Andy's fame wasn't due to the fact that he was an extraordinary railroad man. No; it was because he could do one thing better than any other man from the coast to the plains. Andy

could foretell the weather, all visible and aneroidal signs to the contrary. And that's where Akerman came in, because Akerman had acquired a big, brass-bound aneroid that hung from a three-eighths bolt on the wall of his sheet-iron office in the roundhouse.

Akerman was infernally proud of his barometer, despite the fact that the bets usually went two to one on what *Andy* said the weather would do. Only once did the two prophets really agree. It poured for two solid weeks, then. Part of the time it fogged, and part of the time it blew, but poured always. Three bridges, miles and miles of roadway, and most of the culverts on the west end disclaimed any further responsibility and severed relations with the railroad company. So the smoke wasn't rubbed off the glass of Akerman's instrument to see when it disagreed with Andy, but to take whatever early advantage could be gained in case it *did* agree.

No one knew how Andy did it. Every morning the boys on No. 44 would bring in the prediction for the next twenty-four hours, as obtained from the barometer at West Portal.

"Well, Andy, looks like a nice bit of weather for to-morrow," observed the conductor of No. 44 one day, as he took the white clearance slip from Andy's gnarled hand.

Andy opened his eyes a fraction of an inch wider at that. Somewhere, under the parchmentlike wrinkles of his face, he pulled the strings that pursed his mouth into the shape of an old leather tobacco bag and, throwing his head up, appeared to sniff the cold February air. Thin and dry it was and snappy. Then Andy cocked a partly opened eye at the conductor and barked one word: "Snow!"

"Snow, Andy?" the caboose captain asked with surprise.

"Snow!" barked Andy again.

"It'll have to snow while the sun's shining, then," opined the other. "I'll see you day after to-morrow."

"No, you won't," said Andy, shaking his head with quick, little jerks.

"I won't! Why not?"

"Snow!" barked Andy for the third time and walked away.

THAT afternoon Akerman heard about it in the Junction, as the engine of No. 44 wheeled over the cinder pit. Wonderingly he cast an eye to the sky. The sun was so bright it made him squint.

"Huh!" he snorted and, walking around the big tank, clumped into his office. He stared for some moments at the instrument hanging from the bolt on the wall. "Huh!"

There wasn't anything in particular to worry about. The two barometers didn't agree.

He went half the circuit of the roundhouse, to where a foreman and two helpers were replacing the packing in a booster engine under the cab of the 1014.

"When'll she be ready for a fire, Art?" asked the master mechanic, peering through the lattice formed by the spokes of the Mikado's No. 4 driver.

"Why, I'm a little short of help here. Maybe she won't be on the list until to-morrow noon."

Akerman pinched his cheek between a smudged thumb and forefinger. Maybe Andy was on the right track, after all. He jumped down into the pit, and there he stayed until six o'clock. It was well to have plenty of good engines on the steam list, if Andy *was* right. With a grunt Akerman pulled himself from the pit.

"Better get some heat under her and blow her with steam and hot water. We might——"

The master mechanic didn't finish. Three stalls over, the No. 1414 was just in from the eastward mail run. That wasn't anything unusual, but Akerman blinked and stared again. From the headlight lens to the tank coupler, the No. 1414 was covered with a fine layer of snow.

Over in the office he struck a match to better read the aneroid's message. In four hours, the bronze needle had veered from its early-afternoon position to one that wasn't nearly so comfortable for Akerman. And wind? The roundhouse chief didn't know Andy's grief song in that direction, and he didn't much care. He just took it for granted and started through the door to verify his guess. At that moment, though, the big brass gong dinned out above the shop noises. It was

from the headquarters building. In fact, it was Martin himself. Akerman's brow knitted, as he heard the super's voice; it must be something not so good when Martin decided to attend to it himself.

"Hello, Bob," said the super briskly. "We've just got some dope in from the west end, and it sounds like we're in for it right."

"Shoot!" Akerman had heard of storms before this.

"She came down out of the northwest and hit the other end of the division about one o'clock. Lone Pine reports two feet and getting worse every minute. Blowing like all get out. You'd better send knife plows out ahead of the Western, and the heavy stuff, as quick as you can get power behind 'em." The division boss went on to explain: "I'd have given you this earlier, but we've had wire trouble on the other side of the Gap, and we just got it in ourselves."

The big master mechanic slammed the receiver against the hook and whirled around to consult his locomotive chart. It didn't take the call boys a great while to cut big swaths in the crew's extra list. Long before the first man tramped across the white turntable, five jacks above the roundhouse were roaring great thrusts of smoke and steam into the sweeping blackness of the storm. Five steam-gauge needles bobbed and jerked and went up the first half of the dial figures, in no time at all. Five forced drafts made the whole building tremble, as they sucked heat from the white-hot fire box. Five pipes pumped boiling water into the waiting engine.

It was the old battle that Akerman knew so well. First, the driving fury of the storm's offensive; the hurried mobilization of the defense forces, with every weapon groomed and primed for the fight; then the counterattack—men, steam and steel against snow, ice and bitter cold.

By the time the 1007 backed onto the table and slapped her forward coupler against a new knife plow and a caboos on the tank end, the snow was even with the top of the rails in sheltered places. Where the wind got a sweep at things—well, it wouldn't be long before the polaks

would be digging for the stub switch stands. Already the interlocker was responding to the man at the lever, with labored movements. Already a flickering flame whipping by in the darkness, showed where torches freed a frozen bell crank or cut through ice that choked a frog and made it steam. Traffic crawled in the yards. Signal visibility went to smash. Even the big hooded lights on the main gantry were faint and uncertain, when only a few feet from the bridge. Close-coupled yard engines made frantic, but cautious, attempts to shunt long lines of freight ladings into sidings farther from the main line. Detwiler, the yardmaster, knew it wouldn't be long before he'd need every foot of track he could find. It didn't take much of a storm to make the division heads look like there wasn't another freight car any place else in the world except right there in those few yards. Ordinary stuff didn't stand a chance of seeing the main line; only the special ladings and the passenger outfits got cautioned clearances from one operator's order board to the next.

The No. 1007 banked into the teeth of the blizzard, just five minutes ahead of the Oriental Mail. They made it through the Gap, all right, because the storm hadn't really got going yet. At Flag Rock, the No. 1007 paused long enough for her conductor to wire Akerman that a plow through the Gap, as often as he could put it there, wouldn't be any too often if he expected to keep that stretch open.

The big master mechanic wasn't napping. He didn't underestimate the strength of his enemy. He knew that enemy could cripple his division from one end to the other. And, besides, for the second time, since he'd become boss of the engines at Cascade Junction, the two barometers agreed.

THAT night Akerman missed his supper. In fact, there probably weren't more than half a dozen railroad men in the whole division head that ate a home supper that night. By the time the Western Limited poked her storm-bruised nose out of the Fire Valley, some seventy minutes late, the wires on the other side of

the Gap began to tap nervous warnings and ask for advice.

The situation began to take a more critical turn. For instance, there was that automobile extra, loaded to the door tops with new cars for China—three miles from Prospect Pass, and not enough water in the boiler to show on the gauge. Coyer, the little dispatcher, ordered a patrol engine out from Hill City to try a tow. The patrol left at eleven twenty, and that's the last he heard of her until Pringle reported her limping in, with one side of the engine down, and hardly enough power left to turn the drivers over. Then, on top of that, there was the eastward Northern States Limited, with too many Pullmans for a night like the one they had to deal with—two hours late and getting worse every minute. It was just nip and tuck to see if she made the next block or not. Coyer would have sent a plow out to meet her, but—Well, it has been done sometimes successfully, but at other times they didn't quite calculate right and failed to stop before they got too close.

Midnight—one o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock. In the office they took a hitch in their belts, gulped down black coffee, and set their jaws. Relief? Well, not much. If anything, the blizzard shrieked down through the yards with more fury than ever. At three eleven the wires west of Lone Pine suddenly ceased chattering. The storm had won its first big victory. Just before four o'clock, everything on the Sliver Creek branch went out. Martin began annulling right and left, as most of Coyer's train-sheet lines went from black to red. Red-eyed and weary, they ordered, canceled, re-routed and ordered again. Grim, silent and apparently unmoved by the early-morning reversals, Martin planned his campaign, and Coyer rattled it out on the line, over wires that hummed and twanged in the gale and sometimes parted with vicious whines.

Down in the yards the solid snow, high-banked against the long lines of ice-covered cars, slowly became visible, as a faint, gray light began to filter through the whipping flakes. At regular intervals a yard engine came coughing out of

the swirl and disappeared again, for a moment leaving the main-line steel clear and clean at the bottom of a train-wide ditch. It was the only way to keep the division open. All night the patrol engines swept the Gap and the country beyond. Unceasingly the picks cut into the hard drifts, and the shovelers, working in thirty-minute shifts, built up huge piles at the important-switching points. Three times an hour a knife plow cleared the way down the Fire Valley.

And then came the lull. With a suddenness that was almost startling, the faint, gray light gave way to full daylight. The wind blew in little, hard puffs, and from the headquarters building they could see from one end of the paralyzed yard to the other—paralyzed, except for a couple of switch engines and a storm-scarred string of Pullmans coasting to a weary stop on track No. 4.

It was the westward Eagle, four hours and thirty-seven minutes late. From white-heaped pilot to frozen trailing hose, from crusted roofs to snow-packed trucks, she showed what it meant to run trains when winter came to the Hill Division.

Up again, a couple of figures dropped off the smoker, looked both ways, up and down the yards, and then joined the line of belated passengers making for the warm waiting room. One was dressed in a leather overcoat, a muskrat hood, and big fur mittens. The other didn't fare quite so well in his shabby cloth overcoat and cloth cap, with the earlaps pulled down. They tried the agent downstairs, the baggageman, and finally the super's office. The request was the same—and probably the answer.

"Got somethin' fer a guy t' do?" asked the taller of the two—he of the cloth overcoat.

A harassed chief clerk paused on his way to file a sheaf of delay reports to give the strangers the once-over.

"Naw," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "We'll be lucky to have jobs left for the ones that's here already, by the time this storm lets up. It ain't through yet, by a long shot."

And the clerk was right. It didn't take Andy to tell those in the operating department that the lull was all a false

promise. Akerman took advantage of it to push a couple of frozen road engines into the already overcrowded stalls and change the crews on some of the plows. Detwiler made a hurried survey of his gorged storage tracks and hurriedly cut up a string of coal hoppers, so he could save more room by using up a car's length of secondary track here and there. Martin on the floor and Coyer on the table of the chief clerk's office slept the sleep of the dead, while the day men took hold.

Then the sun went under. The wind suddenly roared down from the desolate heights of the Boulder Range, and the snow came—driving, lashing, with the fury of demons behind its thrust.

All that morning it raged. The Gold Run Cut, six miles east, filled to the crest, with a solid bank of ice, snow and sand—sand that was whipped up by the wind from the clear spaces and borne along with the storm. A knife plow made cautious attempts to clear some of it and slowly retreated back to Cascade Junction—beaten. Since eight o'clock the previous night, no train had come or gone on the Sliver Creek Branch. The situation was grave enough without any complication. And then it came.

The day man was on the dispatcher's trick. Martin was talking to Coyer, when Coyer suddenly straightened up. His ear had caught something coming in on the only open westward wire. Then the brass sounder bar quit bobbing. Coyer's eyes grew big, his mouth sagged, and the color went out of his haggard face.

For a moment Martin stared at him in astonishment. Then he reached over and shook him.

"What's the matter, man!" he asked sharply. "What the devil——"

Coyer blinked fast a couple of times and seemed to come out of it.

"Oh, God, Martin! Didn't you get that? No. 8! The President is caught in the Snake Range Tunnel!"

Martin didn't say anything—just sank down into a chair, like a man that had received a death notice. Then, leaping to his feet, he pulled the day man from his chair with one motion. Staring ston-

ily before him, he called 'West Portal rapidly.

But Andy wasn't able to tell them much. No. 8 had checked in seven hours and forty minutes behind time. The first he knew of anything wrong, after No. 8 had disappeared in the tunnel, was when the rear-end trainman, more dead than alive, staggered into his shack. The President was double headed. So far as the trainman knew, it was only the engines and the first baggage car that were caught in the tons of snow and sandstone that roared down the sides of the cutting, just as they poked their nose out of the east tunnel mouth.

As the sounder finished tapping, Martin sat stock-still. Then his right hand went out to grasp the key again—did grasp it, pressed it, and came back. There was no use trying to call for a relief train from the other end of the division—not on a dead wire. He slumped in his chair; it was a body blow delivered at the fag end of a man's endurance.

AKERMAN got the story over the telephone and came right up to the office.

"It's nasty, Bob," said Martin quietly. "And, unless we can get relief to that train full of people—and quick, too—it'll be one of the ghastliest things these mountains have ever seen, and they've seen some things!"

Akerman scratched a two-day growth of beard and nodded. Martin was right. There would have to be some mighty slim rationing to feed a trainload of hungry passengers on what the already overworked dining car could scrape together. That wasn't so bad; most of them would have enough on their bones to tide them over for a while, anyway. It was the cold! Chances were, ten to one, against the steam pipes being good to carry heat to the sleepers after that slide, even if the engines themselves would hold steam. Yes, they'd have to get help there and get it there quick, too. The master mechanic's fist came down on the table with a crash.

"It's the only way! We've got to get a hole through that slide big enough to get those folks out of there—and before

the mercury begins to coast." He suddenly turned to the window. "But——"

"But what!" The super leaned forward anxiously. "Lord, man, you aren't doubtful, are you? We've got to get through!"

"It's the men, Martin," said Akerman, snapping fist in palm. "I've got a rotary out there and plenty of power to push 'er, but I've got to have men. Those crews've been hitting the top of the gauge for twenty and thirty hours on end. They can't go on forever."

The super was silent for an instant. Then he threw his thumb in the direction of the roundhouse.

"Bring up your outfit, if you have to take a throttle, yourself. I'll have men for you—plenty of 'em."

And Martin did. He pulled some off the switch engines; three came from the shops, and two more from the railroad men's Y. M. C. A. Then Martin's chief clerk knew of a couple more. He sent a call boy after them, with orders not to come back without them. There were others; no one seemed to know where they came from, and no one cared, so long as they could stay awake and had any muscle to sell to the company.

Martin struggled into his own coat, as the rotary, pushed by three mighty Mikado types, came to a stop on the westward tracks below the office.

"I'm going out with this outfit, Coyer. Call Davis to take my place. S'long!"

In another minute the first section of the relief extra shook the building with its starting. As they clattered over the switches in front of tower No. 2, the second section of a knife plow, two engines, and three steel coaches drew up and waited for Coyer to drop the board that was against them.

THERE have been some fast runs in the Gap, faster than that of the relief extra, maybe, but none of the others had the big, lumbering bulk of the rotary to think of. Into the very jaws of the storm they went—jerking, swaying, pounding. For it was the old fight again—men, steam and steel against snow, ice and bitter cold.

Dancing and bobbing, shivering and

sluing, the great, open-mouthed rotary, resistlessly thrust ahead by the three belching Mikados, sought wildly for a hold on the buried steel—found it—lost it—hung for a sickening moment in mid-air—and came back again.

Over sudden trestles that rattled and cracked with the frost; past huge snow-buried piles of slab rock; through jagged sandstone cuttings, where the knife plows had packed the snow in a solid mass against the ungiving walls; twisting like some great hot-blooded snake; roaring like the bellowings of a thousand beasts, they went through the Gap—and out.

With slight heed for the buried switches and the sharp curve east of the station building, they slammed past the half-visible structures at Flag Rock.

A thousand times intensified by their speed, the snow beat against them with unbelievable fury—a fury that was met and matched by the steel thunderbolts, man-made and terrible. It jammed against the pilot bars and made them solid. It filled in, cold and hard, from the pilot coupler to the top of the boiler saddle, then to the headlight, and up the rest of the smoke-box door to the very base of the roaring stack. It made ice of the steam whipped from the cylinders; whitened the rods, and made the cab glass thick and useless.

On they went. Around the broad sweep at the base of the Dutchman's Finger; slithered with giddy, crazy lurches down the pine-covered slopes of Hangman's Hill; struck out blindly across the mile-long fill that made a mountain of a valley, and shot into the very heart of the Snake Range, lofty and unseen.

Then a sudden drop in the speed. A slower, more labored exhaust, as the draft springs bounced to the increased pressure. The rotary seemed to lift from its trucks, as it bore into a huge drift and gutted it, from end to end. From curve to reverse curve, from sheer "precise," to sheltered tunnel, from choked cut to clear-swept fill—that was the Snake Range run.

In the cab of the leading engine, "Long John" Williams fingered his throttle nervously. Every twist of the straining frame, every quick shouldering of the

pilot trucks, as they felt their way along the hidden steel, meant something to him. They were the signs that told him what his eyes could not—told him where he was. Keenly alert, he recognized them. There was the peculiar double slap of the axles taking up the end play, as the spinning wheels met the first rail length of the curve at Culvert 108. Long John eased the throttle and pinched the air up a notch, for Culvert 108 was just east of the cutting on the close side of Prospect Peak. Then he threw the throttle latch to the off position. The Westinghouse needle bobbed and quivered, as he clamped the air-brake control well over. Long John turned to Martin, who stood braced against a gangway stanchion.

"Reckon we'd better have a look at this ditch before we try any borin'. If we wreck that big drill up ahead—well, we might better have stayed at home."

They opened the cab door and stepped gingerly along the glazed running board, over the hissing cylinders and onto the rotary.

But there wasn't anything to see, except the everlasting swirl of the driving snow. It was a big chance—jamming the big plow blindly into a cut blocked by a slide. But Martin's mind was made up.

"Bore!" he said crisply. And they bored.

Advancing the throttle notch by notch, the three engines barked their triple roar of defiance to the white legions. Slowly the walls alongside the ponderous drivers began to grow taller, as the advance continued. Here and there a jagged rock stuck out of the snow, like a bone shoved through the skin. Higher and higher towered the walls of the cut until they were lost in the mad whirl of sweeping gray. Fainter and fainter became the light, as an ever-narrowing slit above them filtered out what was left of the dying day. Remote, bitterly cold, and desolate was the cutting at the base of the Hidden Fortune.

Suddenly the hammering of the three exhausts became intensified a hundred-fold. From the short, stubby stack that stuck through the rounded roof of the ro-

tary, burst a series of deep-chested crashes. Up ahead, the black, open mouth suddenly became alive. Slowly the great blades began to revolve; then, faster and faster they went until the rocky walls hurled back the din of the exhaust with an ear-rending thunder.

Slowly, irresistibly the big machine bored into the packed drifts—slashing, pulverizing and hurling aside, like a huge power saw ripping through a pine plank. Slower and slower became the pace. Harder and harder became the fight. Then a frenzied clatter, as the straining drivers lost their grip on the treacherous steel—a momentary shut-off—and the crawl became a snail's pace. With safeties cascading solid columns of steam, they stopped, reversed and went into it again. A foot—two feet—ten feet they gained. Another standstill—a moment's rest. Then, crushing and whipping, they won another ten feet before the straining drivers lost the grip again, as the wind snatched the sand from the delivery pipes and left the rail too smooth.

INCH by inch they won. Foot by foot the walls slid behind them. But none thought of victory; the job was only half done. A temporary breathing spell, a tightening of the belt, a more determined compression of the lower lip, and into it again.

An hour passed, and another. They were not far from the tunnel mouth now. Another hour—and then defeat!

It happened, just as the rotary hit the drift with the shivering impact of a hundred-foot running start. There was a crunching of the draft gear, a sudden sharp check, like a rushing man brought up under the chin, another wild lunge ahead. The big rotary, with a bellow of hoarse thunder, reared into the air, slued around, and crashed with a chattering blow against the ragged left wall of the cut.

No one was killed, or even badly hurt, except Akerman. They had to pry him loose from between a tool box and a steam pipe. From under the grease and a stubble of beard, his face showed white, and his jaw was hard set with the pain. It was his right arm, just below the elbow.

But, with the buckling of the plow, went the hopes of releasing The President with its load of men, women and children—over there in the cold, dark, foul bore of the Snake Range Tunnel. Desperately they tried to yank the rotary free with chains. But, as it moved, it tipped and slowly lay completely over on its side.

"Dynamite's the only thing that'll clear out the rest of that ditch," declared Long John. "We're through!"

"Where's the stuff?" demanded Martin.

"It's on the section behind us, and God knows where they are."

Savagely Martin gnawed at the end of his finger nails. By the time the second section of the relief train arrived, no telling what disaster might have overcome those imprisoned in the tunnel. With the ditched rotary to think of, they couldn't hope to free The President, but at least they'd have to get a hole in that choked cutting big enough to walk the passengers through to a relief train, when it did come up. And that would have to happen soon, for with every tick of the watch, the margin of time decreased. Outside, the storm was growing less; the wind was dropping in velocity, and the air was becoming clear and thin and cold—*cold*—the bitter, dry, killing cold of the mountains. Twenty-five or thirty below zero wouldn't be unusual before the sun came around again.

THE beads of perspiration stood out on Martin's forehead. It seemed so monstrous, so utterly impossible that they should be so effectively blocked within the last hundred feet of the goal. Time after time, some one of the men would disappear in the night, and by the glare of the headlights try to find an opening in the frozen wall before them, and then return to the engines—beaten. That is—all but one returned.

Working his way back over the track they had fought so hard to clear, went a figure in a leather overcoat and a fur hood and mittens. As he plodded through the cut, he searched one wall of the cut and then the other with the beam of a flash light. Once he stopped and tried for

a foothold in the rocky side, but slipped and rolled down against the rail. He went further, limping slightly now. Then he found it—a place where an almost vertical stratum of iron ore formed a smooth and snow-free means of scaling the wall. Twice he slipped back, but the third time he went up and over.

Sometimes rolling, sometimes crawling on the hard crust of the frozen snow, he fought his way forward to a point where he could see the lights of the ditched rotary and the stalled engines, far below. On he went, slower this time, for the cold was beginning to penetrate through him and make him numb. It went through his clothing, congealed his blood, and left him weak. The tears came to his eyes, and he cried aloud with sudden despair. He felt bitterly alone in a frigid world—black and desolate.

Then came the descent. The wind tore and pulled at him, as he felt his way down the side of the cutting toward the tunnel mouth. He couldn't be far from the bottom now. Just a little longer. Sheer will made him go on. Then the wind suddenly bore down upon him with savage fury. Desperately he clung to the bare rock. Slowly the strength oozed from his fingers, and, half sliding, half plunging, he went down.

He didn't remember much of what happened after that. As consciousness came back to him, he crawled painfully from the drift that had broken his fall—crawled toward a faint light. Then he came up against something cold and hard. Slowly he realized that the light came from the cab of The President's leading engine. Again the tears sprang to his eyes, for the battle was really half won now. He laughed—a laugh that ended in a dry sob. No, he didn't have any dynamite to blast loose the rest of that cut, but—

There was no one on the engine. She was still hot. He stepped upon her fire-door trip. The heat revived him, but with the heat came a lightninglike pain in his foot. He forgot it, though, as he shoveled coal onto the almost dead fire. There was one chance in a hundred that the coal would take. Luck was with him. Carefully he nursed the feeble embers

into flame. Up leaped the fire, as the draft began to pull.

Dimly he wondered where the crew was. Probably back in one of the Pullmans, trying to stay warm; or, maybe, they were hurt. He looked out of the cab. There was a fairly clear space of a dozen yards before the pilot would hit the main block in the cut.

Between firing periods, it didn't take long to uncouple the leading engine from the one behind it. Then there was a little job on top of the boiler that had to be attended to.

SLOWLY the pressure began to mount. Twenty-five, fifty, one hundred, two hundred. He opened her throttle. There was a hiss of steam, but the 1480 didn't budge. He gave her more. From below came a sharp snap. The frozen spots separated, and the next moment the 1480 buried her nose deep into the last stretch of snow and sand that blocked the cut. He threw the quadrant and tried again. The big Pacific shook herself and charged like a bull at the frozen mass. Her engineer whirled around and made for the gangway to jump. But, as he turned, there was a flash of paralyzing pain, and his ankle gave way. He fell to the trembling plates of the deck—waiting for what seemed an age and was really a split second.

There was a sudden wild lurch to the right and up. Under him the deck plates heaved and shook, as the 1480 reared like an unbroken broncho. With drivers thrashing in the air for an instant, she came down—down through the crusted mass that fell in over her and covered her from stack to cab.

Slowly her only passenger opened his eyes. Through pain-numbed brain came the thought that he wasn't hurt any more by the 1480's plunge. He tried to get to his feet. The pain went through him, like speeding knives, and he went down again. He cried in anguish. It was now or never! Dimly he could see that the pressure was dropping on the gauge. The sight gave him strength. Hobbling along the uneven deck, he shoveled more coal into the furnace. Each scoopful seemed to sap a lifetime of energy from him. He

was faint—nauseated. His shovel struck the edge of the fire door, and the coal, with its precious share of wasted human effort, peppered over the crown sheet and fell to the deck. With supreme effort, he tried again and slammed the fire door shut. The fire roared, and then the pressure mounted. Two hundred ten—twenty.

There was something else to be done.

He got over the rear of the tank, somehow, and dragged himself toward the tunnel mouth. It was easier now. His foot and ankle were not hurting so much. Slowly he covered the way back to The President's second engine. It wouldn't be far now until he could reach the Pullmans and help. But he didn't reach them. With the exception of a few feet near the top, the tunnel mouth was completely blocked by what was another stream of the slide. As if in a dream, it came to him why they hadn't heard the 1480's exhausts when he forced her into the drift. As if in a dream, too, a little voice seemed to tell him that it was too much of a climb to reach that little hole in the slide. Besides, he didn't need to reach the Pullmans. He was warm enough where he lay in the snow, and his ankle didn't hurt any more. He—would stay there and—

AND that's where Martin found him. half an hour later. It took that long for the relief-train crew working on one end, and The President's crew working on the other, to beat, shovel and otherwise build a narrow path through the loose, tumbled debris that had once been a solidly packed obstacle to the advance. They had to work around the tank of the 1480, but the rest of the engine didn't bother them any—it just didn't exist. No one knew how high the boiler pressure went before she let go, taking snow, sand, rocks and everything but the frame with her.

There were only two people under Doctor Woods' care on the run back to Cascade Junction. One was Akerman; the other was a much smaller man—in fact, just a lad. He didn't look half so big without his fur hood and leather overcoat; although ten years had made some

difference, all right. And, as the red-headed, freckle-faced youngster opened his eyes, Martin leaned over him and said, in that quiet way that Martin had:

"I see you've come back, Carrots."

The big master mechanic turned over so quick that Doc Woods nearly had to do the arm-setting job all over again. When the pain eased off, so he could open his eyes, he stared—and stared some more at the figure on the next bunk.

They had a good visit on the way back to the Junction.

"And you screwed the 1480's safety

valve down, did you?" said Akerman, squinting hard. "And you've got the brass-bound nerve to ask me for a job, as soon as your other driver gets workin' again. Why, you've not yet got over your little habit of blowin' things up. What did I tell you I'd do if I ever caught you foolin' with any of this company's stuff again? What did I—Huh!"

But Akerman didn't give Carrots any more foot trouble. Carrots had enough of his own. And, besides, Carrots was a special case—a very special case.



EVERY HOUSE WITH "AN AMERICAN WING"

ONE of the many helpful departments maintained at Washington by the United States government is the bureau of home economics. Many housewives of America can testify to the real value of this department. In a recent bulletin of this bureau Uncle Sam makes an eloquent plea to put "an early American room" in every house. The motive back of this recommendation is excellent, but the advice strikes us as rather belated. It might have been apposite made to our great-grandmothers, or even to our grandmothers. Fifty or sixty years ago, braided and hooked rugs, samplers, Paisely shawls, and antique furniture were part of the attic "junk" in all the better houses. In the more conservative and less opulent houses of New England they were still the lares and penates in daily use.

But with the advent of the antique craze, which began more than twenty-five years ago and which in the past ten years has assumed vast commercial proportions, this government plea for the antique sounds to us not quite candid, if not cynical. The famous American Wing, which was opened to the public last year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, has undoubtedly stimulated a genuine interest in early American furniture and domestic architecture, but it has not reduced the commercial value put on these things, nor can it increase the number of these things.

So great has been the demand for these things in recent years, that every farmer in the Eastern States now holds some shabby and shoddy piece of modern furniture or glass for which he is asking a fancy price because you can see it in its "original setting." We fear that in this instance Uncle Sam has overshot the mark. Instead of promoting a healthy interest in what was good in earlier American furniture and architecture, he has only stimulated a home industry which was already too active. Here in the East the collecting of antiques has been exploited to an absurd degree. It has glorified many ugly things and put beauty out of the house to lug in monstrosities on the score of their antiquity. When mahogany was exhausted, maple was made the fashionable wood. When no more maple was to be had, farmhouse pine was exploited. Now begins the era of the Victorian period.



Leguerre of the Lost Division

A Diplomatic Exchange

By Howard Fitzalan

Author of "A Message to Don Miguel," Etc.

In a quiet Swiss town, where world powers play at intricate games, a certain suave government agent dipped into an affair concerning two vital code messages—and the result was romantic and surprising enough to jolt even the serene Leguerre.

DEAD!" mourned the Associated Press man.

The tall youth opposite nodded somber concurrence.

"Not even a coroner's case, either," he sighed. "Just naturally dead. I'd break down and cry if our table wasn't so blame' public. If you could only imagine me a week ago this night, rolling out of the sleeper—thrilled to pieces!"

The older man masked his grin with his glass.

"I know," he murmured. "Your first assignment, wasn't it, to cover the Powers at conference? Were you expecting an invitation to pull up a chair while a few open covenants were openly arrived at?"

Young Burrows, who'd been sent to this first Lake of Bienne sitting of the Big Seven, directly after his transfer to the Paris bureau of the New York

Planet—and thereby, though for only a day, had esteemed himself divinely favored—submitted his brief in defense.

"Give me credit for better sense, Gurney! No; I wasn't looking for any dear old chancellors to buy me dinners and stuff me with state secrets between courses. That wasn't the idea. What the deuce would *Planet* readers care about the juggling of a Balkan boundary or two?

"I did come all primed for color, though, and atmosphere. I thought I'd find Yagerdorf sizzling with intrigue—jammed with desperate men in long cloaks and slinky fedoras. People with knives up their sleeves, and their eyes on 'the papers.' You know what I mean?"

Gurney grinned more widely, no longer hiding his amusement, as he glanced about the crowded café.

"Underground diplomacy—the international spy business—is guff," he said. "There may be a couple of secret agents in the mob here, but they dress the part and play the game in a new way nowadays. Getting some fool clerk petrified and pumping him is as far as they go. Spies of the present day punch time clocks and watch their diets and get their Saturday afternoons off, like everybody else on government pay rolls. You won't find romance—*that* kind, anyhow—anywhere but in the dictionary!"

In their roving, the Associated Press man's eyes had settled on a late diner, just then rising from a table at the rear of the café.

"Heaven," said he piously, "has provided an illustration of my text. D'you see that chap back there, getting ready to leave us?"

Burrows glanced over his shoulder.

"Yes; I see him. Happen to have met him, too—got to chinning with him over at the lake, a couple of days ago. He's from New York, here for the winter sports. Name's La—Le—Leguerre. Well?"

"Your modern diplomatic agent," chuckled Gurney. "You'll observe that the cloak has turned into a dinner coat."

The *Planet* correspondent stared, not at the subject of the remark, but at his companion.

"Leguerre?" he scoffed. "No; you can't put that one over. I've been in the game long enough to know play boys when I meet 'em. I had Leguerre pegged before I had talked to him for three minutes."

"I'm not saying," observed Gurney, "that Leguerre's got any government connection now; although, considering his habit of popping up here and there over the Continent, I've sometimes wondered. But back in war days, I know he was counted one of the aces of the I. C. D. Do you remember the old Intelligence Control, Burrows, or had it already become the 'Lost Division' in your day?"

Leguerre, stick on arm, was moving languidly forward. The Associated Press man hailed him.

"Hullo, Nugent! You know Burrows here—New York *Planet*? We're both of

us starving for news. Can't you help out?"

Hesitating, Leguerre blinked amiably.

"Why, not exactly to-night," he said. "Perhaps you'll find me good for a paragraph in the morning. Starting practice for the jumping meet, you know—my first time on skis this year. Likely as not I'll break my invaluable neck!"

OUTSIDE the café, Nugent Leguerre looked from his wrist watch to the long row of lighted windows in the Yagerdorf town hall, across the square. Things, he surmised, couldn't have been run off as smoothly as Coulter had predicted. It was after eleven, and the conferees still were in session. The inference was fair that some one, representing less a national aspiration than a die-hard school of pre-war diplomacy, was at the fusty old game of saber rattling.

Staring toward the windows behind which the spokesmen of the sovereignties sat at their politely poisonous love feast, Leguerre marveled—not for the first time—at the survival in *Welt politik* of such irreconcilables as Durner and Bronti. Almost certainly it was one or the other of these two whose obstinacy was responsible for the late session.

What could they gain here by obstructionist tactics? If stupidity and obstinacy usually were running mates, that would be truer than ever now. How could any one who called himself statesman fail to realize that this conference was without real significance; that the formulas to be adopted were preordained by an impregnable majority of nations united for peace and possessing indisputably the power to police the world?

Leguerre, had frankness been permitted to him, would have agreed with the bored correspondents who had halted him in Hugo's. So far as sensation was concerned, the possible rising of war clouds anywhere, save over incalculable China, the Lake of Bienne Conference was indeed "dead."

But that was at eleven—or only a little after eleven. For Mr. Nugent Leguerre, business—that peculiar and some-time perilous business which had brought him to Switzerland and winter sports, when it

was Florida and the tarpon that invited his soul—looked up with a rush in the scant hour remaining before midnight.

As he started out from the café, as a matter of fact, Leguerre had expected no more of the night than the utterly disillusioned young Mr. Burrows. It was no inner whisper of what was happening in that other and darker plaza which decided him to stroll a while before turning in; merely, the night was fine and the *café royale* which had topped his dinner had driven sleep from him.

He was entirely without objective. Turning corners at random, he had wandered through the narrow, hilly streets for a half hour, when one of them emptied him into another square, darker and smaller than that across which the town hall and Hugo's faced each other. By the contour of the gables which lifted out of thick freestone walls against the stars, he recognized the Place St. Martin.

ONLY a single light, and that flickering on a post in the middle of the park, shone at this hour in the Place St. Martin. Leguerre, made aware by a movement among near shadows of figures lurking in a doorway, gripped his stick harder, as he skirted the park. A moment afterward he was laughing softly at himself, and at the instinct which had insisted that he put himself on guard.

It wasn't Paris or London or Chicago or boisterous Rio that he roamed now, but sleepy and crimeless old Yagerdorf, and he'd let somebody's scullery maid, trysting with her gendarme, give him a start.

At the end of the plaza he stopped to dig a burned-down cigarette end out of the thin ivory holder that sometimes recalled to him an even thinner situation of a certain evening in Fez. Then, suddenly, he was on the alert again; for, as he plucked with ungloved and chilled fingers at the elusive stub, a whistle had sounded across the square. He drew back into a doorway himself, then. In a few seconds the whistle was repeated—a signal of some sort, he was sure.

Another sound came presently. A window was being opened, slowly, cautiously. Directly after that he heard a scraping.

This noise he could locate, and, straining his eyes, he could make out a figure moving in human-fly fashion across the face of what appeared, at a distance, to be a blank wall.

The wall, though, must have offered holds both for fingers and toes. That was evident, when the climber presently began to descend. As he came down, Leguerre started toward him, keeping to the shadows cast by the wide bow windows typical of Yagerdorf architecture. He had placed himself definitely by this time—knew that house of the dead wall, and could call its tenant by name. The stormy petrel, Durner, was quartered here. And—

Leguerre was only a couple of paces away when the climber's feet found the walk. He spoke sharply, choosing French as the language most likely to be understood.

"A strange way, m'sieur, to leave a house!"

The wall scaler straightened and wheeled. He was quite as tall as Leguerre and bulkier of build.

"*Peste!*" he grunted. "What is that to you?"

His hand had shot to a coat pocket, as the voice came peremptorily out of the darkness, but he gathered confidence after taking stock of Leguerre.

"It's not your affair!" he reiterated. "You'd better go on."

"But I elect to make it my affair, *mon ami*," said Leguerre softly. "I think that very possibly you have something which doesn't belong to you. It would be well for the sake of your conscience that you hand it over."

The wall scaler couldn't appreciate the point; nor could he see merit in further words. With a shout, he sprang, but Leguerre wasn't waiting for him. He had stepped nimbly back. His fist lashed out, cracked smartly against a jaw that met it full on. The skim of ice on the walk abetted the blow; the big man went down.

Leguerre was conscious that the shout had awakened more than an echo. Feet were pounding behind him, as he bent over the fallen one—running feet. The people out of the doorway down the

square were coming through the park, and out of the corner of his eye Leguerre observed that instinct hadn't been so far off a while ago. His scullery maid and gendarme had turned out to be three men.

The three were not fifty yards away, having apparently started across the plaza at sound of shout and scuffle. Leguerre nevertheless spared an instant to explore the pocket over whose contents the late adversary had betrayed concern. His fingers encountered a large, heavy envelope. He snatched it, tucked his stick under his arm, and fled.

IN Hugo's, in the Place Romont, Mr. Burrows of the *Planet* foreign service peered between the curtains at his elbow and sighed a deeper sigh.

"I drop a tear into the tawny wine," said he. "The lights in the town hall go out, *ting-aling*, and the uncloaked ace of the former what-d'ye-call-it parades past us, yawning. You're right, Gurney. In the dictionary's where it is!"

That, if time be a factor, was at eleven fifty on the night the Big Seven sat late in quiet Yagerdorf.

FIVE minutes still were lacking of midnight when Leguerre turned the key in the door of his suite in the Hotel Vendome. He was yawning again, as he groped for the light switch, but that was a yawn never finished. His hand came back before it had found the button. He didn't want light—not quite yet.

A chill draft had struck his cheek, and that was something to be explained. He'd left all windows down, locked. He could be sure he had, for it was a habit of years. A window open meant that some one had been in the rooms in his absence—might still be in them.

Leguerre thought of the wide ledge under the windows. He had studied his surroundings, that being habit, too.

Had he been recognized in the Place St. Martin? Was it possible that the men lately his playfellows in that brisk game of hide and seek between the Place St. Martin and the Place Romont had contrived to reach the Vendome ahead of him?

Without switching on the lights, he could see nothing, and darkness at the moment seemed better to serve him. It was a total darkness into which he had come. He had drawn all shades, and obviously they remained down. The one at the open window was lazily flapping.

Leguerre maneuvered his back to a wall and strained his ears for other sounds, as he had strained his eyes in the lesser blackness of the Place St. Martin. There was nothing but the swishing of the shade.

Presently, oriented, he took a cautious step toward the table in the middle of the room. His automatic—futile appurtenance it had seemed in Yagerdorf—was in the drawer. Rather, it had been. Devoutly Leguerre wished he could be sure of finding it there now. That big envelope with its massive seal, acquired though it had been by sheerest chance, was too promising a trove to be surrendered without struggle.

He took a second step, and before his foot was down an untoward complication obtruded. A bell sounded raspingly—his telephone.

Leguerre halted and caught his breath. The bell rang again.

Sacrificing silence to speed now, he went on. He barked a shin against a chair leg and sent the chair squealing indignantly off on its ancient casters. But the table was just beyond, and the pistol was still in the drawer. With the chilly grip in his palm, Leguerre felt the situation vastly improved. He ignored the importunate telephone and made for the switch.

Light revealed nothing. The room was as he had left it. The open window, the flapping shade—and perhaps the intruder as well—were in his bedchamber. Leguerre stepped through the connecting door, switched on more lights, and made a hasty search. The second room of his suite also was empty, and the bath beyond as well.

The ringing of the telephone had settled into an aggrieved, persistent, staccato buzzing, when finally he acknowledged the call.

It was Coulter on the line—some-time Middle-Western banker, some-time na-

tional committeeman in a pivotal State back home, and here installed in Yagerdorf as "unofficial observer" for the United States government at the Lake of Bienne Conference.

"Hello, hello!" came his voice, husky with an agitation rare to him. "Is it Leguerre? Asleep, were you? I've had a devil of a time raising you."

"Sorry," said Leguerre. "I just came in. You sound as if you'd been having a hard evening over the way."

"No, no!" cried Coulter. "The trouble's here. *Here!*"

"Trouble?" echoed Leguerre. "What do you mean?"

A groan answered him.

"I can't tell you over the telephone. Great Cæsar, no! Come down, please, Leguerre—and come fast!"

BELOW, Leguerre found Coulter pacing his rug, while his secretary, a youngster new in the state department, sat sprawled in a deep chair, blank with dejection. The observer was in a mood to match. Conceivably, he might have found relief in pulling his hair; but he was quite bald, and instead he chewed his nails.

Leguerre sniffed, as he entered the room, and looked quickly about.

"The ladies have gone?" he asked cheerfully.

Coulter stared.

"I don't get you," he said. "But if it's a joke you're trying out, let me tell you this is not time for it. What's gone—what's gone that counts—is a batch of dispatches from Washington. Gad! Snaked right out of my box with a duplicate key!"

Leguerre rubbed his chin.

"Or, perhaps a hairpin," he suggested.

Blake, the secretary, struggled up in his chair.

"Can't you be serious?" he demanded. "It's no trick we're playing on you. The chief——"

"I *am* serious," said Leguerre—"very. I mean, a hairpin's nothing for any lock to sneer at. An expert can do wonders with one."

"Hairpin!" barked Coulter. "Fiddlestick! If you're in Yagerdorf for any

real purpose, Leguerre, it's certainly not to be facetious in a crisis."

"But I insist that I'm not facetious," Leguerre protested mildly. "I don't say that a hairpin was used to get at the dispatches, whatever they may have amounted to, but it's certainly a possibility." He sniffed again, and this time most elaborately. "Where are your noses, gentlemen? To me, this room fairly reeks with heliotrope. I make no claim to profundity of deduction when I say that if anything's missing—*cherchez la femme!*"

Coulter halted in his march and elevated his nose.

"By gad, you're right!" he exclaimed and scowled accusingly at the pale secretary. "Come, Blake, talk up! The stuff's not on you?"

"Not heliotrope!" came firmly from the deep chair. "Never!" And then: "Jove, I get it now, too! It *is* heliotrope!"

Leguerre grinned and fished for a cigarette.

"I accept my vindication," said he, "in the spirit in which it's offered. Not another word, please."

He found a match and a chair, stretched out his legs at ease, and looked up receptively.

"I don't suppose," he said, "that you've really a great deal to tell me, except that the papers were left here under lock, and that they disappeared?"

Coulter nodded.

"That's about all," he replied grimly. "They were in the dispatch box yonder, when Blake and I went down to dinner. Presumably they were still there when we came back, and when we left for the night session of the conference. But now they're gone; and what I'm asking is what we're going to do about it?"

"Rather a poser," murmured Leguerre. "I think I could work on the question in better style if you'd give me some idea of the purport of the dispatches?"

The American observer passed a hand over his polished forehead.

"You've hit on a bad part of the job, Leguerre—maybe the worst part," he admitted, yet more deeply distressed. "I can't give you an idea. Haven't any.

myself. The dispatches didn't come in until late in the afternoon, and they hadn't been decoded. The night session had been decided on, you see, and of course I wanted Blake with me. I intended getting at 'em, myself, as soon as we returned."

"I see," nodded Leguerre. "You kept to your intention, but there was nothing to decode."

"Exactly. It was only a minute before I telephoned you that I discovered the loss."

Leguerre gazed with concern at an ash that had dropped from his cigarette onto the rug.

"Pardon," said he. "You know, Mr. Coulter, there's nothing that annoys me more than having the custody of documents of any sort. But when I do have to accept the responsibility, it's become my practice either to keep 'em under my eye or actually on my person."

The observer's flush carried to an extraordinary height—glowed, indeed, under his wisp of war lock.

"Neither Blake nor myself," he rejoined stiffly, "expected to be held so late at the conference. There was only a minor point hanging over from the afternoon session to be cleared. We had, of course, no intimation that Bronti and Durner would get to drum thumping over the Mandovar plebiscite. The effort to bring them together held us until nearly midnight. We could hardly rise and walk out, you know."

Leguerre waved a deprecating hand.

"I wasn't presuming to criticize, Mr. Coulter," said he. "Naturally, the dispatches were as well off in your box here as anywhere."

Blake broke a little silence.

"Maybe you'd like," he suggested, "to examine the box?"

"What use?" asked Leguerre lazily, through a curling smoke ring.

"Why—ah—you know so much more about these things than I. But—ah—finger prints, you know—and all that."

"I wouldn't know what to do with finger prints if there were any," said Leguerre. "This is a bit different from murder, you know. In these cases one never calls the police."

AGAIN Coulter stopped to face the bafflingly calm young man whom he had summoned to counsel.

"We seem to be getting nowhere."

"I agree."

"Can you offer a constructive suggestion?" the harassed observer challenged.

"One, at least, I think."

"Well?"

Leguerre got the better of an imminent yawn.

"Why, it might be a good idea to cable the state department, give 'em the number of the last dispatch received and decoded, and ask 'em to rush duplicates of the rest. Practical, don't you think?"

"Very," remarked Coulter ironically. "And in the meantime——"

"I wouldn't worry," said Leguerre, and the yawn came on, despite him. After that, contrite, he shook himself erect, blinked rapidly and tamped a fresh cigarette. "But you know, Mr. Coulter," he said, in a burst of enthusiasm all but startling, "you know, this is really one of the amazing occurrences of my experience. Considering it from all angles—yes, by Christopher!—it is!"

Coulter spoke dryly.

"I was afraid," said he, "that you weren't going to realize it."

Leguerre regarded him with faint reproach.

"I mean," he amplified, "it's amazing that any one should have bothered."

Coulter's eyebrows lifted sharply.

"Please explain."

Again Leguerre made his tired gesture of deprecation.

"Maybe," he confessed, "I don't put it well. But the fact is, of course, that the United States isn't actually in on this conference of the Big Seven. We're merely looking on—giving our moral support, if you please, to the Powers that come closest to approximating our own national ideals. We're for peace, even if a big stick should be needed to preserve it."

"Naturally," acquiesced Coulter. "However, I still don't see——"

"Internationally speaking," pursued Leguerre, "there isn't exactly a frantic interest in peace, or in the private affairs of governments as definitely committed

to peace as ours. The mystery here, as I see it, is what curiosity anybody could possibly have concerning any communication from Washington to you. In short, I can't imagine your wastebasket being rifled, Mr. Coulter, let alone your strong box being robbed."

"But you have been informed of the fact."

"Yes; and every minute I find the fact more interesting. I want to know why."

"What I want," asserted Coulter crisply, "is—the dispatches. I can be assured that you'll—er—take steps?"

"I fear," said Leguerre sadly, "that any steps taken at this juncture would be found on later examination of the footprints to have run a perfect circle. There's nothing in the world to do but sit tight, trust to luck, and await developments."

"Developments?" queried Coulter.

"I can't suggest what they might be," replied Leguerre, "for the whole business is too insane. But you'll probably know before I do. If anything like an aftermath does turn up, I'd be awfully obliged if you'd let me know. For tomorrow, at any rate, I'll likely stick close to my rooms. I'm planning, you see, to try my hand at a little decoding myself. It's a job that'll take time, because first I'll have to discover the cipher."

Blake sat up again. He wasn't so new in the state department that he hadn't heard whispers of Leguerre.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You've stumbled on something?"

Leguerre, on his feet, grinned and rubbed his knuckles.

"On an icy walk in the Place St. Martin," said he. "And I think I broke a hand."

DESPITE its size and the magnificent dimensions of its seal, the envelope that had been stolen from the safe of Doctor Durner and so swiftly commandeered from the thief proved to hold only a single sheet of cipher.

That made the job of solving the code just so much harder, and a long morning's work over it led Leguerre to only two definite conclusions. One was that the cipher had some bearing on the impend-

ing plebiscite in Mandovar; the second, that Durner's government had vastly improved and cannily complicated its system of official codes since war time.

That had been his sum total of progress when, at half past one, he tucked the cipher sheet into its stout envelope, slipped the envelope into an inner pocket, and went down to luncheon.

Up to that time he had had no word from Coulter or Blake, and so it was evident that nothing had materialized in their direction to throw light on the disappearance of the dispatches.

Downstairs, he found the hotel café cleared by now, except for a party of elderly English tourists, remote and glum and already at dessert. Before he had ordered, they were rising; but, as they stalked out, still another belated guest turned up to bear him company.

Leguerre, facing the door, saw her hovering there for a little before she entered, and set her down as a newcomer to the hotel. Had he seen her about before, he knew he would scarcely have forgotten. She was pretty and slim and blonde, and the blue knitted skating costume which she wore rather strikingly suited her.

So much Leguerre observed before his eyes returned to the menu card. He heard the woman ask a question in throatily accented French which confirmed his impression that she was either of Teuton or Scandinavian blood; and then, without again looking up, he knew she had entered the room.

From the instant she crossed the threshold, she filled it; perfume billowed from her, as if she were fairly drenched in it. To Leguerre it was a scent at once clamorous and startling with challenge. He stole another swift glance at her over the card.

"An invitation?" he asked himself.

The waiter at his elbow bent lower.

"M'sieur?" he murmured.

But Leguerre's thoughts had fled far from food. They had altogether transferred themselves to the Vendôme's decorative new guest, and to the odor which she flaunted. Pungent, blatant, insolent, it mocked him now with just such a sharp overtone of heliotrope as had been left

to linger in Coulter's rooms after his dispatches had taken wing.

THERE were certain persons in Yagerdorf who would be mightily interested in the contents of that envelope of Durner's. Leguerre knew that, and knew who they were. But he, personally, didn't care a rap what manner of secret instructions were guiding Durner's course in the conference. Whichever flag flew in Mandovar was of no moment to Washington.

The text of the cipher had ceased to be a matter of curiosity with the discovery, a couple of hours since, that it dealt with the plebiscite. He had gone on only because the key to the new cipher, should he hit upon it, might at some future time be turned to account.

Leguerre ordered more food than he wanted; and, leisurely picking at it, decided that he could very well postpone the renewal of his attack on the Durner code. The heliotrope lady promised a better reward.

She, too, he noted, had little appetite. She had ordered only a salad, a pastry, and tea. Once, looking up, Leguerre caught her eyes upon him, but immediately and demurely she lowered them. Again he found himself wondering. Had it been speculation that he surprised in her gaze?

When presently she arose, it required no far stretch of imagination to deduce that she was bound for the lake. In itself her costume was evidence of that; and, moreover, tips of steel blades peeped from the blue-cloth bag she carried.

Leguerre, after watching her out of the hotel, lost no time in getting into his own skating togs. With no definite plan formulated—indeed, with an intuitive conviction that he'd in due time be offered a lead to follow—he walked out to the lake.

There, with surprising promptness, intuition was vindicated.

In the little clubhouse that reminiscent and provocative odor of heliotrope once more assailed him, but the lady of the violent perfume was already on the ice. Through the window, as he changed from walking shoes to skating shoes, he

glimpsed the blue costume. She was far down the lake and still alone.

Tourist interest had turned that day from skates to skis, and not more than a dozen people had come to the lake. Leguerre gave thanks that the tomboy twins from St. Louis, who had lately elected themselves his skating partners, weren't among those present.

The woman in blue was already a mile from the clubhouse, but still she kept on. She seemed to have set a course for a steep-gabled gray chalet perched on a knoll in the middle of a little parked estate across the lake from the town. But if that were in fact her objective, she was at any rate in no haste to attain it. Within a few minutes Leguerre had overtaken her. He was no more than a hundred yards behind her when, apprised of his nearness by the crunch of his runners, she cast a quick glance over her shoulder.

Here in midlake the ice waved in treacherous, wind-ruffled hummocks. The glance cost her a tumble. With arms thrown wide, she strove wildly for balance; then, with a little cry, she was down.

"My ankle!" she murmured in her throaty French, when Leguerre had skated to her and helped her to her feet. "It turned beneath me when I fell, monsieur."

"I hope it's not a sprain," he said.

For an instant she released her hold on Leguerre's arm, then clutched again.

"I am afraid, monsieur," she said, "that the ankle will not bear my weight. It is fortunate that you were close."

"The good fortune," smiled Leguerre, "is mine. I'm sure I can get you back to the club, and if walking's too painful we can have the Vendome motor come out for you."

"But no, monsieur," she said. "I am not a guest of the hotel."

She read the question in Leguerre's quick glance and laughed.

"I lunched at the Vendome to-day—*mais oui!*—and I think I saw monsieur in the café. But I do not live there, nor even in Yagerdorf. I am stopping with friends—there." She nodded toward the lonely chalet. "If I could trespass on monsieur's kindness——"

"A privilege," murmured Leguerre and bowed. "Mademoiselle will honor me by trusting her arms to my neck?"

She colored and laughed and shook her head.

"No, no!" she protested. "I am not so badly hurt that I must be carried like a sack. The support of monsieur's shoulder will be enough, I am sure."

She knelt on the ice, and after vigorously rubbing the ankle announced her readiness to go on. Leguerre for the second time helped her up; then, tucking an arm under hers, he slowly stroked off toward the gray house on the hill.

There was another mile or more of precarious going over the rough ice, but toward shore, under the bluffs, the surface was smoother. When they were close in, Leguerre could see a tiny dock jutting into the lake from the foot of a path that descended from the chalet.

He headed for the dock, swung his companion upon it, and when she had produced her small walking shoes from the blue bag he dutifully began unlacing the pair to which her skates were attached. She winced and cried out, as he was pulling off the right shoe; and yet, surprisingly, he found that ankle quite as slim and trim as its mate.

"One more queer thing," he told himself. "Now an injured ankle that isn't swollen!"

She was up by then, balanced on her left foot, gingerly putting down her right. Leguerre glanced down at his skates.

"From this point on," he lamented, "I'm afraid I'm useless to you. Perhaps if you were to hail them at the house they——"

"I will not need to," she said. "There is less strain now. I can walk, monsieur. The pain is almost gone. You were kind to have come so far."

"I am sorry," Leguerre assured her, "that I can't very well go farther."

From the dock she sent a smile down to him.

"Perhaps, monsieur," she said softly, "we shall meet again. It would not be so strange—no?"

"Stranger things," agreed Leguerre, "have happened."

He watched her off the wharf and onto

the path, and saw that she limped only a little. From the brow of the hill she waved to him. He called an "Au revoir!" to her then and skated thoughtfully away.

BACK at the Hotel Vendome, Leguerre stopped to chat with the round little manager and casually introduced the subject of the solitary chalet across the lake.

"I do not wonder, monsieur," said the manager with enthusiasm, "that you have admired the place. There is in all Switzerland no more desirable small estate. The owner is an Austrian nobleman, but this season he has not come himself. The chalet is let to an opera singer, a beautiful Italian, I have heard. She has with her, I believe, a pupil or two. They come occasionally to the Vendome, these pupils, but madame I have not yet seen."

One of the flapper twins came into the foyer at that moment, with skis over her shoulder and bobbed curls flying. She spied Leguerre from afar and hurled herself breathlessly upon him.

"Oh, *Nugent!*" she burred. "Wherever have you been to-day? Don't you ski, really? But never mind. You *do* one-step gorgeously, and this is dance night. I claim you now as mine for the evening. You're *mine*, understand, and you're positively not to go mixing me up with Helen again!"

And so, perforce, Leguerre began his night dancing, while the distraught American observer and his secretary sat again in late session with the conferees of the Yagerdorf round table. But at ten o'clock, most mysteriously, he turned up missing. As one twin frantically sought him, and another blissfully cheered on the quest, he was hastening toward the lake with a mackinaw over his dinner coat and a pair of newly acquired clamp skates under his arm. His lesson of the afternoon hadn't been without profit. These new skates, when he had crossed the ice on them, could in a moment be kicked off.

IT was not yet eleven when he reached the end of the lake, but the chalet already was dark. He located it only by skating along the shore until he had come

to the dock. He stood for a minute or two in indecision. What use to go on, he asked himself, if they'd all retired? He had confidently counted on finding them up, talking—being lucky enough, perhaps, to find a listening post near to them.

Eventually he decided that, having come thus far, it would be worth while at least to reconnoiter. From the shore below he could not be certain, but it seemed to him that he saw a reflection of light somewhere at the rear of the chalet. That might be in the servants' quarter; but, again, it might be in a library or saloon. He took off the new skates, left them on the dock with their key beside them, and started up the path.

He went warily, but even so there had been no guarding against the wire over which he tripped when he was close to the house. It extended directly across the path, at a height of no more than five or six inches above the gravel.

Nor was he left in doubt that the wire had been strung there for a purpose. A bell was jangling somewhere in the chalet; and suddenly, as if by the closing of a master switch, lights flooded the place upstairs and down.

With the alarm sounding and the household aroused, it was obviously no neighborhood to be lingering in. Leguerre turned and started swiftly toward the lake, but before he had gone a dozen paces a figure materialized to bar his way. It was a stocky man who interposed himself—a servant, evidently—and in his hand he held a pistol.

"Who are you?" he demanded in French.

Leguerre, calculating his chances against the ready gun, decided they were nil.

"I think I have made a mistake," he said. "I am looking for friends who had a chalet on this side of the lake—by name, Bonheur."

The man laughed grimly.

"There are no Bonheurs here, monsieur, and there is no other chalet on this bank. Do you not choose a late hour for calling?"

"You don't know the Bonheurs," remarked Leguerre lightly.

"I do not," agreed the man with the pistol. "What is more, I believe they are an invention. You must come with me to madame!"

"At this time of night? No; I couldn't think of intruding. I'll go along, rather. Good evening!"

Leguerre took a step forward and abruptly halted, for the gun had lifted to a line with his heart, and the eyes behind the barrel were narrow with warning.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "Since you do insist, I'll explain myself to madame."

But no better explanation of his prowling, than the lame one he had already offered, had occurred when his captor urged him into the chalet, with a nudge of the automatic, and with another prod he had invited him to enter a drawing-room, opening off the tapestried reception hall.

Leguerre saw, as the door was closed behind him, that he was alone in the room; but almost at once there was a stirring of the portières at the far end.

The portières parted. A woman—a tall, slender, dark and smiling woman—stood facing him.

"Ah, but this world is small!" she cried. "So many thousands of miles from where we said good-by, *le bon Dieu* brings back to me my gallant Monsieur Leguerre!"

He would have known the voice, her warmly tinted English, even had she not come before his astonished eyes. Madame of the lonely chalet, the resting diva who preferred isolation to the prosy diversions offered by neighboring Yagerdorf, was the same Marie Delange who of recent years had been accounted the cleverest diplomatic free lance of them all—the sometimes admired, always incalculable, all but legendary "Marie, Queen of Plots."

Mistress of this present situation, certainly, she was. A trill of laughter proclaimed her joy in it, as Leguerre stared blankly.

"But perhaps, dear Nugent," she said, "I do not give the credit where it belongs. Is it Heaven I should thank for you—or heliotrope?"

IT was she, after all, who had explained. Her bantering question made many things suddenly clear to Leguerre. She had deliberately baited a trap for him, and he had come walking fatuously into it. He would probably not get far with an attempt at dissembling; and yet, since she had already been so prodigal in providing leads for him, it seemed the better strategy to wait for another.

He repeated her last word.

"Heliotrope? I don't understand."

Smiling more broadly, she motioned him to a chair.

"Please, Nugent!" she protested. "You do not flatter me by pretending to be stupid. Who should know better than I that you are not?"

"I seem," said he, "to be in rather a stupid position now. It appears almost as if you had been—expecting me."

"I was," she calmly admitted. "I could not be sure you would come to-night, of course, but I knew I would see you soon. You have been most obliging—but, indeed, you have always been that—and prompt. You would have come to me this afternoon, I think, if calling were *de rigueur* upon ice skates. Oh, *that* was the droll and stupid situation, Nugent!"

He grinned.

"I probably would have come up to the house," said he, "if there'd been any way of getting free of the skates. Your nice little friend had had a spill—hurt her ankle. I was sorry it wasn't possible for me to carry her clear to the doorstep. But certainly I never dreamed that you were here."

"I will believe that, monsieur," she cooed. "And can you see that even so early you had confessed—your profession?"

"Have I one?" Leguerre murmured. "How a confession?"

"Not only have you a profession, but you are an adept in its practice," the dark woman replied; and now she spoke seriously. "You admitted it, Nugent, by—shall we say, by following your nose? Did not Mr. Coulter report to you last night the theft of certain papers from a dispatch box in his suite at the Hotel Vendome?"

Leguerre blandly returned the question.

"Coulter? You don't mean the toothy chap who's taking in this conference show as next friend, or something of that sort, to Uncle Sam? Why should he report anything to me?"

She had taken a cigarette from her case, and now she leaned forward, as Leguerre held out a match to her.

"Once upon a time, monsieur," she said, "you proved yourself cleverer than I. But now, if you will be as frank as I am, you must admit that the tables have been turned. Should you care to know what has become of Mr. Coulter's missing dispatches—or have you guessed?"

"You seem to be sure," observed Leguerre, "that I have some interest in this man Coulter."

"I am sure," she nodded. "It is you yourself who have given me the assurance. That is as I wished it. A moral certainty was not sufficient. My personal inner conviction of the business which brought you to Yagerdorf needed reinforcement before my purpose was suited. I wanted badly to see you—had even a proposal to make to you that I have long considered. But when we met I preferred that it be on such terms that the cards on both sides should be on the table."

"It was to that end I caused the dispatches to be taken from Mr. Coulter's rooms—to that end, and no other. I made certain that the heliotrope scent should remain after the papers were gone. Ah, it should have been strong, Nugent; I had directed that the perfume should be spilled upon the rugs—everywhere. It will last for days."

"To-day I sent Mitzi, loud with heliotrope, to the Vendome. She, too, was following my directions. She followed you into the café. Then she left it for you to follow her, and you did. When you appeared at the lake and skated after her, you showed your hand. It wasn't golden hair and a pretty face you were pursuing, but an odor of heliotrope. So you confessed yourself an associate, *sub rosa*, of Mr. Coulter—and so, secretly, an agent of your government. Am I not

in a position now, Nugent, to expect frankness from you?"

Leguerre burst into a laugh.

"If I wore a sword with this uniform," said he, "I'd surely offer it to you. You've cleared a mystery, Marie. I couldn't imagine what value any one could possibly hope to extract from the Coulter dispatches. In the very nature of things, they were bound to be innocuous."

Mademoiselle Delange's slim hand went to her bosom, and she passed to Leguerre a half dozen thin, folded sheets.

"These have served their purpose," she said, "and I return them with the promise that no attempt has been made to decode the cipher."

Leguerre bowed, bewildered, as he accepted the dispatches.

"You have truly earned frankness," he told her, "and you shall have it. But again I must say that I do not understand—unless you spoke of some proposal?"

She slowly inclined her head.

"You hadn't heard—hadn't even had a hint—that I was near Yagerdorf? And don't know, then, of my present employment?"

"Bronti?" he hazarded.

"You could not be farther off," she smiled. "No, Nugent, I am here in behalf of Doctor Durner. You see, my dear, I cast off all indirection with you. And again to an end. There was a time, Nugent, when I believe that I interested you. Is that true?"

Leguerre nodded.

"You were pitted against me then," she pursued. "You did your duty. But even so, did I not eventually command your respect?"

"Always."

"You believe now that I am competent—professionally?"

"Incomparable," said Leguerre. "There is but one Marie Delange."

Her eyes, clinging to his, were suddenly warm.

"Then hear what I propose!" she cried. "An alliance, a union of our forces—yes, yes—of our lives!"

She leaned closer to him and rested her hands upon his knees. Her words

came tumbling in a passionate outpouring.

"This is new to you, Nugent Leguerre. But it is old, very old, with me. Since you worsted me in Washington—in New York—you have never been out of my thoughts. It was never revenge that I wanted; not that. I can accept defeat with philosophy, although it is seldom that I am beaten.

"But I have built a dream, my dear. There have been other men—partners of my profession. One after another I have cast them off. Never have they been my equals. They have been either stupid or jealous—and that is stupidity, too. I had searched the world, and out of all the world I have found my ideal associate in you. The world! The world! Together we could command all that it has to offer—we two!"

She finished breathlessly and left Leguerre breathless, too, as she arose before him. He got to his feet; then her hands went to his shoulders.

"You're—you're not in earnest, Marie?" he protested weakly.

"Look in my eyes!" she commanded him.

He did and saw a hunger flaming there.

"What can I say?" he asked. "What of—other obligations?"

Her grip tightened.

"To a woman?"

"To a country—my own."

She laughed.

"What need has America for you in these days? Your country has settled down to peace, to isolation, to the old pursuit of dollars. America doesn't need you, Nugent, as I need you!"

She saw that he hesitated.

"What can I say now?" he reiterated. "I must think, Marie."

Her hands fell from his shoulders.

"No," she sighed; "we are not of the same blood, you and I. I might have known that you would not answer me at once. But you have heard me. You know my heart. Will you come to me tomorrow?"

"When I have an answer."

Mademoiselle Delange made a weary gesture of assent.

"My motor will take you back to Yagerdorf," she said. "And I—I will be waiting."

She called a servant and gave an order; when the motor was humming outside, she followed Leguerre to the door. He turned to her there and pressed a heavy brown envelope into her hands, with half a smile.

"I think this will be of interest, Marie," said he, "to good Doctor Durner. He will be more interested still in a positive assurance that the information contained in the cipher is known not even to myself."

It was she who was staring, as he ran down to the waiting automobile. He looked back as the machine started and saw that she still stood in the open door, clutching the cipher to her breast.

AT the Vendome, when Leguerre returned, young Mr. Burrows of the *Planet* was dancing with the curly-haired twin. They both came to him.

"Gurney has been telling me a lot about you, old man," grinned Burrows. "One of these days I'm going to make you stand and deliver a piece of news. You know, you look to me as if you had something up your sleeve right now!"

Leguerre laughed.

"News in Yagerdorf?" he repeated. Well, now, let me see. Personally, I do have a little news. I've just been in receipt of a highly flattering offer, but, since I can scarcely tell you what the offer is, and haven't the faintest notion of accepting it anyway, I really don't think there's anything for the paper in that. Now answer me—do you?"



TO SAVE THE LONGHORNS

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, if you had told a man from the ranges of the Southwest, that in a period of one generation the longhorns would face extinction, he would have derided you for a know-nothing tenderfoot. Yet, to prevent the extermination of this hardy breed, the United States department of agriculture thought it necessary a short time ago to install a herd of longhorns in Wichita National Forest in Oklahoma, where the type can be maintained. The longhorns have been assigned a pasture which adjoins a meadow land apportioned to a herd of buffaloes. In numbers, in endurance, and in a hardy adaptation to the conditions of the rough range, the longhorns gave every promise of outlasting the centuries. They were superb animals, as any one can testify who has seen a great herd of them, with horns flashing in the sunlight, dashing across a Texas range. They were the descendants of cattle brought to America by the early Spanish colonists. Their native hardihood increased under the rough conditions of the early ranges, where they continued to increase and multiply on a minimum of food and water. Their long and short horns proved natural weapons to defend their calves from the attacks of wolves and other beasts of prey. Their very virtues, later on, when they were reduced to a state of domestication, proved their undoing. After the ranges had been cleared of wolves and panthers, their horns only injured one another, particularly in a stampede. Better food only increased their bone and muscle, rather than fat and milk. When the ranges began to be cut up and the demand for heavy beef cattle increased, breeders began to experiment with various crosses. The improved stock, which has resulted from crossing the longhorn cows with the short-horn bulls, has thrown the longhorn into the discard. The new type retains the hardiness of the old rovers with the flesh-building qualities of the English cattle and the stock found on the farmlands in our own North.



Ed Grogan's Escape

By Fitzhugh Green

Author of "Buried Alive," "Open Fire!" Etc.

The special order they got out in Washington on Ed Grogan's case, after it was all over, read as follows: "He not only risked his life for a shipmate, but he cheated death with an ingenuity and pluck that warrant the attention of every officer and man in the United States navy."

YOU wouldn't think of Grogan as a hero. He didn't look that kind of gink. He was a large seaman, with shoulders that swung into apelike arms, capable of pulling the biggest oar in the fleet. And he had the long, lean body to go with such shoulders.

But Ed was a mild-mannered mariner, despite his vertical black hair and hooked piratical nose. His ruddy face and kindly blue eyes were more those of a middle-aged spinster nurse than of a full-blown seafaring man. That was one reason Ed was still just a seaman, first class, U. S. N. He was content. He left it to the others, to push ahead for ranks and jobs they often couldn't fill. If he had an ambition, it was to get even with O'Callahan, the chief boatswain's mate, who rode him unmercifully on every possible occasion.

For the better part of a year, Ed had

been attached to the submarine *P-2*, basing on San Pedro, the seaport of Los Angeles. The *P-2* was one of several flotillas of subs operating with the battleship fleet. During ten months of the year she cruised about alone, leisurely engaged in torpedo practice and other exercises calculated to train her crew for war. In October and November she joined her sister eggs and played at battle with the "Big Fleet."

November 15th was at hand. Sixteen mammoth dreadnaughts lay in a long line behind the breakwater. Inshore from them were the light cruisers, lean and graceful. Nine divisions of destroyers lay inside the cruisers. Nearest shore and moored to their tenders were the submarines.

Boatswain O'Callahan lined his men up at dawn.

"Maneuvers to-day," he told them in

choppy tones. "Big battle." He waved seaward a hand as large as a ham. "Enemy out there. Battleships fire at the targets. Destroyers lay a smoke screen. Us subs run in and attack when we get orders from the admiral."

Thus laconically did the boatswain outline the navy's annual maneuvers in full formation, the culmination of twelve months of hard work on the part of thirty thousand men and three thousand officers, to say nothing of the unceasing training of a fighting force valued at five hundred million dollars.

"It's a big day," concluded Boatswain O'Callahan.

He was right.

At this moment a small and freckled seaman, named Mitten, a lad about half O'Callahan's size, opened his jaws full width and emitted a noisy yawn. He had weathered a rough liberty the night before, and his head still steamed from the vitriolic liquor he had bought at two-fifty a pint from "Mexican Pete" behind the fish wharves.

"Shut that trap!" exploded O'Callahan.

Some one snickered. The boatswain became hysterical.

"You drunken little bum!" he screeched. "You don't care! You'd just as lief see the whole blooming navy at the bottom of the sea! You're a menace on this boat! To-night I'm going to the skipper and give him the low-down on you. A bad-conduct discharge is what you've got coming, you yellow runt!"

Breath and language failing, O'Callahan stepped forward and shook the diminutive seaman, as if he had been a terrier with a rat.

Then a very terrible thing happened; that is, terrible by formal navy standards. Big, slow, blinking Ed Grogan stepped out of ranks and laid hold of O'Callahan's thick arm. A naval subordinate disrespectfully *touched* his senior! It was rank heresy!

"What the hell?" stammered the boatswain. Such prodigious disrespect as this he had never seen in his whole twenty years of service.

"Lay off my buddy," said Grogan un-

emotionally. "The law don't permit you to put hands on a man."

"The law!" sneered O'Callahan. "Ha! Ha! We'll see about the law when we tie up to-night. The law! Ha! Ha!" He held up five gnarled fingers. "Non-reg suit; overstaying liberty; not up at reveille; dirty clothing; hammock lashed backward; drunk on the beach." He checked the items off, one by one. "You and your friend are guilty of all of 'em. And I been letting you off easy!"

Grogan heard and knew that what O'Callahan said was true, and that on every count O'Callahan could prosecute him for infractions of strict fleet regulations, within the last twenty-four hours—him and Mitten, too. Inwardly he cringed. Outwardly he was inscrutable as the steel plating on the conning tower behind him.

"We'll have an accounting to-night," repeated the boatswain savagely, as he went over the side toward the *P-2*, moored to starboard. "And it'll mean a summary court, you gurry whopper, or I'm a liar!"

The crowd, awed by this show of official vengeance, melted away, embarrassed. Ed Grogan and little Mitten stood dismally, watching their chief petty officer disappear.

"Let's skip the outfit," said Mitten. "Shall we?"

Grogan scratched his wiry hair. He was puzzled. Things always went a little too fast for him.

"Shall we?" said Mitten again. Desertion was heinous, but at least escape.

"Dunno," said Ed slowly. "Anyway, we got to fight the enemy first."

Grogan was right. At sunrise bits of bunting shot to yardarms and flickered down again. Black smoke belched from the funnels of the big ships. Presently the fleet was under way and steaming to sea. Serried ranks of light craft swarmed defensively around the dreadnaughts. Low, black nubbles on the outer edge of the formation marked the submarine, running almost submerged.

There were turns and counter-marches during the "approach." The admiral on the big flagship wove his gray ranks into what seemed irretrievable tan-

gles. But with a magical flag or two he always straightened them out.

Soon to those in the basket masts and high aloft in spotting planes was visible the string of targets, far off on the horizon. This string, towed by a tug, was the enemy fleet.

More signals; buzzing radio messages; bugle calls to quarters, and huge guns trained abeam. The greatest bit of shadow boxing in history was about to begin.

Suddenly from the leading ship burst a mushroom of red smoke, slashed through with lurid flame. Down the line swept the holocaust, as the greatest navy in the world opened fire with a hail of steel bullets that could instantly sink any other variety of ship afloat, twenty miles away.

"Jiminy gosh!" gasped little Mitten, at the wheel of the *P-2*, a mile on the disengaged side of the embattled fleet.

A quartermaster thrust a yellow radio slip into the hands of the commanding officer of the *P-2*.

"Swing inshore and return to port submerged when firing over," read the dispatch.

Twenty minutes later, the battle triumphantly over, the *P-2* headed landward. Her skipper shifted control to the little room below his narrow bridge. He gave orders to submerge; men by valves swung them open, admitting water to the ballast tanks; helmsmen at the horizontal rudders thrust their levels downward. Graceful as a porpoise, the *P-2* nosed downward below the surface.

Mitten went off watch. He dodged O'Callahan, prowling abaft the control room. He ducked forward to the torpedo compartment, where Grogan was at "Acey Deucey" with a Greek machinist.

"Give me a word when we get in, Ed," he told his friend. "I got to calk it off a bit. Going behind the tubes."

"Right, kid," said Ed without looking up.

Mitten snaked in among the nest of steel cylinders that ejected the submarine's chief projectile and was soon dead to the world in much-needed sleep.

So passed an hour, with the *P-2*'s periscope just awash, and her long, elliptical

body gliding invisible, like some gigantic black fish beneath the surface of the sea.

Then came disaster. Fog shut down. For safety the *P-2* emerged. Lookouts were posted fore and aft on her wet deck grating. Ships passing in and out tooted all about them. Darkness of winter shrouded the murky sea. The low, dark, illy lighted submarine was not visible fifty feet through the thick, clammy vapor all about.

A long, groaning boom sounded on the port bow. "The Frisco mail boat," muttered the *P-2*'s skipper. He replied in kind, with the sub's patent fog "squeaker." To be sure, he stopped, gave her right rudder, and backed. But, before the navy men knew what was happening, the big merchant ship was upon them. She crashed into the helpless *P-2*, rolling the smaller craft nearly over.

There was great confusion; screams, bawled shouts of warning; crunching of steel against steel, rushing of water flooding in tons through the gaping hole; a great running about on the decks of the liner and thudding of oars upon oarlocks of the lifeboats.

It was a catastrophe—complete and tragic annihilation. The *P-2* went almost instantly to the bottom. Yet, since it was still early evening, and rescue instantly available, all should have escaped.

Due to the prompt action of the *P-2*'s skipper in ringing the alarms, all did escape—that is, nearly all; for it was but a matter of a few seconds for the trained submariners to leap from the *P-2*'s torpedo room, her engine room, and her battery compartments to the nearest hatch and skin out on deck.

Little Mitten, dead to the world behind the lower pair of torpedo tubes, was the only one who didn't escape. In his sleep of exhaustion he didn't hear the alarm.

Ed Grogan escaped all right—that is, he got as far as the control tower. Then abruptly he remembered his buddy, asleep behind him. He hauled up short. Dreadful noises pounded against his eardrums. Instinct called out for him to dash upward and save himself.

For a few seconds a terrific struggle

went on inside the big seaman. It wasn't a struggle of reason. Grogan couldn't think fast enough for that sort of thing. It was just a deep, undefinable torment, as if he were being pulled in two different directions at once. Which he was: on deck was safety; below was little Mitten.

Suddenly, right in the midst of the darkness and shouts and awful chaos of that crushing torrent of water, Ed Grogan turned and dashed back toward the torpedo room.

As he ran, a wave of cold brine struck him heavily in the back. It threw him headlong at the half-open door of the compartment toward which he was plunging. A flash of comprehension came into his slow mind.

He was too late now to save himself. His only hope lay in entering the torpedo room and closing in the water-tight door after him.

He hurdled the coaming and swung the door toward its knife edges. But pressure of water behind it was enormous. Ensued a brief, sharp struggle. Tons of water poured in. But Grogan was a powerful man. He won. Once he got a single dog down, the others were easy. From his efforts, the inrushing stream thinned out to a trickle. As he wrenched the last handle over, he sank down, exhausted.

A piping, plaintive voice rose from the corner:

"Why do they do this?"

Little Mitten, sitting waist deep in the chilly pool that covered the floor plates, splashed to his feet. He settled a long, bewildered look upon the body of his friend, Ed Grogan, huddled against the closed door. He blinked.

"Hi, Ed! What's up?" he asked.

No answer.

"I say, big fellow, are you sick?"

Grogan's barrel ribs showed under his wet undershirt, as he heaved a great sigh. With prodigious effort he hove upward and stood unsteadily upon his wobbly legs. He turned about and leaned his back against the door that stood between him and the sea.

Fear suddenly blanched the face of Mitten. "What is it?" he screamed.

"Why you behavin' that way, Ed?" His tone became beseeching, as if he dreaded to know the truth. "Ain't anything wrong, is there, Ed?"

"Yes, there's something wrong," replied Grogan slowly. "Mitt, we're sunk to the bottom of the ocean."

"Oh-h-h!" gasped the little man. "It couldn't be!"

"It is," repeated Grogan with a sort of terrible finality.

"Where are the others?"

"Went away."

"Went away! *Where?*"

"Jumped overboard."

"Why didn't you jump?"

Ed shook his head. "Dunno," he said. "Might as well have, I guess."

Understanding crept into Mitten's brain.

"You come back after me, Ed."

Grogan nodded.

Slushing through the water, Mitten stumbled to the side of his buddy, who towered over him. "You're white, Ed—*white!*" he sobbed.

With that, speech ceased. Being true seafaring men, the problem of the moment was more pressing than that of the future. True, they were trapped in one end of a sunken submarine, with no immediate hope of escape. There was neither food nor water in sight. The contained air might last a day or two before suffocation claimed them. But these were all problems of to-morrow. The problem of to-day was the cold, wet discomfort of their soaking clothes, the dire lack of food, and no sign of sleeping accommodations in their clammy dungeon.

Grogan climbed up the torpedo rack and pulled down a small roll containing two shirts and a pair of trousers. Mitten dug a blanket out from behind the gunner's bulkhead chest. Incidentally, it was against regulations to stow clothing or bedding in either place.

It was Mitten's idea that they unbolt some of the longitudinal torpedo braces and lash them from the inner tube ends to the nearest stanchion. This they did, and presently had a raised platform frame, across which could be laid some target battens that happened to be overhead. From the waste locker, which

luckily was above the flood, they hauled out enough of the soft cotton to make a passable bed. Then the two, clad in dry clothing and outwardly calm, lay down to take stock of their predicament.

Mitten was by far the more perturbed of the two. His voice shook, and he lay close to Grogan, with the pitiful faith of a little child.

"Will they get us?" he asked in a quivering tone.

Grogan yawned. "Don't see how. It was dark and foggy when we was rammed. Guess we went down quick, and there was so much excitement no one will know just where it was."

"But they'll drag, won't they?"

"Guess so. But draggin' takes days. Remember the time we dragged for that torpedo alongside the dock, don't you?"

"But we're a hundred times bigger'n a torp."

"Yes, and a hundred times worse lost when it comes to finding us."

Mitten groaned dismally. Grogan laid a thick palm on his buddy's chest. "Don't take on, Mitt. It'll come out all right."

"But how can it? If we were a whole sub down here, we might pump her out and come up."

"Or get shot through the torpedo tubes, like Commander Whiting did once."

"Gee, that was some stunt! What would happen if we opened 'em now?"

Grogan thought for at least five minutes. "Flood us and drown us like a pair of rats," he said at last.

Mitten groaned again.

"Ed, how long will this air last?"

Grogan grunted. "Don't ask me them scientific questions, Mitt. I ain't got any learning about this game. I'm a sailor, not a perffessor."

"Do you suppose if we had a perffessor down here he'd help?"

"Sure. Those fellows invent things right on the spot. Why, I knew one once that could hypnotize a man and then crack a rock on him."

Conversation dwindled. It was futile, anyway. Both men knew their fragment of the *P-2* lay on the bottom. It took no superintelligence to reason out the micro-

scopic chance of their being rescued before the oxygen in the air was exhausted. Both had been members of working parties that helped raise the *R-6* when she sank, six weeks before, alongside the dock. With all the gear on the station and divers helping, it had taken a fortnight to budge that craft in shallow water. And now the *P-2*, or the shattered hulk of her, was lost in the fog and darkness, miles from port down the coast.

"Ed," whispered Mitten.

"Yes, Mitt."

"Do you suppose they'll think we're drowned and won't look for us?"

"Probably," came the merciless reply.

"Oh, my God!"

Mitten, his nerves unstrung to start with, gave way to uncontrolled tears. When he heard the gentle snore of his heroic friend, he somehow felt comforted. Hours later, he, too, fell into slumber broken unceasingly by gruesome nightmares.

When they awoke, both noted for the first time that two lights still burned. The phenomenon had seemed so natural that neither had noticed it before. They decided that somewhere in the wreckage a battery still worked. If so, it would be well to husband its limited store of current. So Mitten turned out one of the lights. The dimmed lights still further depressed their spirits.

Soon both began to feel definitely groggy.

"It's the air," suggested Mitten, hoping it wasn't.

"It's the air we've used up," corrected Grogan. "A few more hours, and we'll be feeling it bad. Chokin', sort of."

"Can't you do *something*, Ed?"

Grogan scowled. "Maybe—maybe. Let's sure enough think about it."

For an interminable time they thought. A bit of chewing tobacco and a bottle of distilled water among the gunner's supplies quelled their pangs of hunger and thirst. They talked little. In time they slept again. When they awoke they felt worse than ever. Both had splitting headaches and were dizzy. And both knew their position was desperate.

Grogan determined to be sure their two logical exits were out of the ques-

tion. Carefully he loosened a dog on the water-tight door. A stream of water shot halfway across the room. He cracked a nut on one of the torpedo-tube bolts. A hissing watery thread resulted. It was indisputable that their intact fragment of the wrecked P-2 lay on the bottom of the sea.

And no help had come. Was it night or day, light or dark, above them? Was it still foggy? Was it fair or foul? Were vessels out looking for them? Or had the newspapers already printed their names in black headlines?

Through the slowly cracking sanity of the two wretches these questions zigzagged with the buzzing insistency of a fever dream.

Most of the time they lay on their improvised pallet of steel, spruce strips, and cotton waste, and jostled one another's consciousness with aimless observations. Little Mitten was inclined to be tearful; Grogan's mood was more often profane.

Whole centuries of time passed. The gruesome horror of it became unbearable. Mitten showed distinct signs of breaking altogether. This probably was what stimulated Ed Grogan's mind into a bit of reasoning that, considering his ignorance about such things, approached real genius.

"Mitt," he said slowly, "if you put a glass of water upside down into a bucket, it don't ever get full, does it?"

Mitten, bordering on delirium, babbled a meaningless reply.

With painful deliberation Grogan climbed down and took a wrench from the gunner's chest. He reached down into the oily water at the bottom of the compartment and slid aside one of the deck plates. Down a short ladder he clambered until he reached the bottom of the P-2. The water was now halfway up his chest.

He took a big breath and ducked under. He felt around until he put his hands on an elliptical circle of bolts. When he came up for breath his dripping face wore a grim smile. He had located a manhole in the bottom of the boat.

"And when you put a glass upside down in a bucket it don't ever get full,"

he repeated aloud to himself, as if testing the theory by the taste of the words on his parched tongue.

He ducked again, fitted the wrench over one of the nuts, and yanked it loose a quarter of a turn. Instantly he could feel the pressure of intruding water against his hand.

He came to the surface, climbed out, and joined Mitten on their couch. He watched the water level rise, inch by inch, in their small prison. Now and then he muttered words that sounded like the incantation of a medicine man. They were: "When you put a glass upside down in a bucket, it don't ever get full."

It began to look as if his theory was wrong. The water rose to within a foot of their couch. He knew he could stop it by diving down and giving that nut a turn with the wrench. But it wasn't time yet.

When he nudged Mitten and told him to get busy and move their bedding atop the torpedo tubes, his companion for the first time realized what was going on.

"We're leaking!" croaked Mitten.

"Sure, I started her."

"*You started her!*" Mitten seized his friend's hand in both of his. "Why did you do it, Ed? We got to die now? Can't we wait a little longer?"

"Shut up," Grogan told him savagely. "Get busy and help me move this stuff up here."

In a funk of abject terror, Mitten obeyed.

Perched on top of the tubes, the pair watched the water rise. It still came slowly. But Grogan did not cease to reckon when he should dive and shut off the spring he had opened, in case it became necessary. He knew he was taking a desperate course. But he also knew that their lives hung by the merest shred.

"My ears hurt!" bleated Mitten.

Grogan's eardrums felt as if they would burst. He jammed some waste in them and directed Mitten to do the same.

By this token he knew that inner air pressure was nearing that of the water outside.

When the rising tide of black brine was lapping at their feet, it seemed to slow up. For a long time Grogan was afraid to make a mark on the bulkhead and be sure. He sat there, cramped and aching, tormented by shooting pains, not only in his head but in every joint, and waited.

Then he took his wrench and scratched a mark on the paint work, just above the level of the upcoming water. He counted to a thousand by ones.

He looked at his mark. The water had not reached it.

He turned to Mitten. "We've got a chance," he said. But the lad was too far gone to understand. Strain of hours in poisonous air had sapped his strength.

Grogan dove and began to unfasten the other nuts on the manhole. It took him three dives to take off one. There were twenty.

Now began a final fight for life. The pair were cooped up on top of the torpedo tubes, fifteen feet above the manhole to which Grogan had to dive. There was only a small air space. The one light had gone very dim. Mitten was in a semicoma.

Dive after dive Grogan made. Had he been other than a powerful man with a constitution of iron he must have early succumbed in the icy water, after his long ordeal before this last anguished effort.

The last nut came off. For two dives Grogan wrestled with the manhole plate. His heart pounded, and green lights danced before his eyes, as he put his failing energy into the tussle. Finally he got it up. A great wave of hope struck him at what he saw—the greenish tinge of sunshine filtering down from the outside surface.

He returned to the perch on top of the tube. He tried to rouse Mitten. But the small seaman hung limp in his arms. He rested. He could not tell how long he might have to stay afloat outside, even after he emerged.

He seized Mitten with one hand and put the other over the lad's loose lips and nose. He took a great lungful of the rank and powerfully compressed air. He slipped off, struggled down through

the depths, thrust Mitten's body violently through the open manhole, and dove after him.

Up he went outside; but, oh, how slowly! It seemed his lungs must violently give way to their wild passion for inhalation. But he clamped his teeth and waited. Up he shot—faster—faster—then out—out into the crisp air and sunshine of a sparkling southern California day.

Swallowing great, gasping breaths of the pure atmosphere, he whirled about for sight of his shipmate. He lunged out and caught the unconscious Mitten.

A shout smote upon his ears. A moment later a vertical white cliff loomed over him. Voices called, feminine as well as masculine. He felt himself hauled up aboard a vessel. Then the sunshine went out.

It was a yacht—one of those shiny crafts with snowy canvas and teak decks, such as only a movie millionaire can afford.

An hour later, bound in, the yacht hove to in response to a signal from a navy tug. The tug hailed her.

"We're trying to locate a submarine sunk hereabouts," shouted a blue-clad figure in the uniform of a navy chief petty officer. "Have you seen any signs of wreckage? Two men were drowned in the accident."

It was O'Callahan.

The sleek owner of the yacht stepped to the rail. With a sense of the dramatic, he waited until his craft was close aboard the tug. Then he announced:

"Yes, we have the bodies of your drowned men aboard."

He stood aside and motioned to a pair of large wicker chairs in which were comfortably ensconced Ed Grogan and Mitten. Several lovely young ladies draped about them were supplying sandwiches and coffee.

Grogan pointed across to O'Callahan, who stared with bulging eyes.

"Who's the noisy guy?" he asked, rudely pointing toward his senior officer.

Mitten turned an expressionless eye on the purpling O'Callahan and replied:

"Dunno, Ed. Just one of them common sailors, I suppose."



Flendship Mo' Bettah

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Sargasso," "Ho! Sonora," Etc.

"Gold is where you find it," said some one; and, surely, men never searched in a more curious place for treasure than did old Joe Noel and his crony, "Quartz" Mettick. They found, though, something better than mere gold.

IF you could have halted old Joe Noel, ditch tender for the Sierra Crest Power Company, somewhere on his sentry tramp through spruce thickets, and told him that two pieces of newspaper—one wrapped about a side of bacon and the other pasted on the wall of his mountain shack—had been ordained by fate to dovetail into a ticket of destiny for him and his little old side partner, "Quartz" Mettick, chances are that old Joe would have accepted your surprising statement as gospel, without question or demurrer.

For, during a long period of years, before his luck went bad, and he was forced to become a ditch tender at one hundred dollars a month, Joe Noel had been a gold miner. Aye, so many, many years had he followed the lure of the yellow stuff hidden in Sierra gravels, so often seen the overturn of all laws of reason-

able expectancy, that what you might set down as a child's credulity on old Joe's part, he would defend as nothing more than his solid belief in the infinite power of what he called "happen chance."

Even you, possessing the pleasant faculty of divination, might go so far as to say: "Joe, I see it in the cards that you will be digging for gold in the hold of an old ship." And, if I know old Joe Noel, his answer would come with not the slightest hesitation: "Gold lies where you find it."

Yes, Joe Noel believes in fairies and in the infallible power of "hunches" and in the wisdom of "stringin' along with luck"—more now than he ever did before. As who wouldn't, after the bewildering affair of the *Sister Jane* and what came out of a prospect shaft sunk squarely through the middle of a San Francisco downtown building property?

LET me show you Joe Noel on his ten-mile footpath, following the power company's ditch—his daily bread-and-butter stint. Let it be just where the ditch follows a sharp elbow of Horn Mountain and suddenly becomes a wooden flume hanging dizzily over space. This used to be Joe's favorite resting place. Following the narrow one-plank footpath out over the trestle struts, Joe would come to the middle span between gorge lips and there sit on the edge of the wooden box, hurrying water running cool and green just under his coat tails. Away down and across folded ridges, as far as eye can carry, stretch the terrific scars of the old hydraulicking days—man-made canyons striped with white and ocher clays.

Although he is nearly seventy, Joe Noel, the ditch tender, is a compelling figure of a man; for his shoulders are still as square as ship's knees and as resistant. His big head is covered with thick curls of white creeping from beneath a floppy hat brim, and his beard of a Mormon bishop is carried still with a certain alert poise of youth. His warm blue eye—you see such eyes among the old-timers of the Sierras—are ready to kindle still with undying hope. One would hardly count Joe Noel a superannuated man. And yet he worked as a ditch tender and was paid a niggardly wage to keep intact a segment of a power corporation's waterway.

And this hurrying green water in the flume under old Joe's coat tails—once, before a reactionary legislature passed laws against it, this same water took the terrifying plunge down a thousand-foot declivity to be compressed into steel at the eight-inch monitor, which Joe Noel, the pipeman, turned against a mountain of gold-bearing gravel. Hundreds of men once peopled those great gashes in the mountains now locked in silence. White men diverted the torrent-hewed gravels into sluice tunnels, wherein fat gold clogged the cleats, while Chinamen mucked in water to lay new lines of pipe.

King over all of them, then, was big Joe Noel, the pipeman: he with the great crowbar of water, prying and goug-

ing into bowels of earth, under the flexing of his hands. King, too, of a Saturday night in Calamity—now a husk of a town, with not a single inhabitant—when the little marble flickered round the roulette wheel, and the fellow with the oiled hair called, "Make your play, gents!"

Why, in one night Joe Noel, pipeman, could drop more gold than in this sad time Joe Noel, ditch tender, made in a month!

This day you catch Joe Noel day-dreaming over the trash of dead yesterdays, because his home-coming at the end of sentry duty possessed a fillip beyond ordinary. For old Quartz Mettick, like himself a relic of the hydraulicking days, and for the last ten years sharer with Joe in a cabin on Burro Flat, would be back from three days down at Nevada City. It was lonely without old Quartz in that unpainted shack of jack-pine shakes.

"Hullo, you paddle-footed ole water spider!" Mettick flung over shoulder, as he lifted the packsaddle from Susie before the shack door.

With equal affection, Joe wanted to know the state of a frazzled old pine weasel's health, and how was tricks down to Nevada City? These greetings passed, life in the bachelors' cabin on Burro Flat dropped easily into its accustomed groove, with the three-day hiatus of Quartz's grub-buying expedition already dim history. Conversation was only a casual thing in the life of the two partners.

Little Quartz, who was slope-shouldered from long years of pecking in the narrow tunnel of his gravel mine—slope-shouldered and with wizened face carried far forward, like a querulous blue jay—little Quartz had undergone a great trial with a clatter-jawed woman in the dim past, and he held unnecessary words an abomination.

So this night, when skillet and plates were washed, and pipes were drawing under the swinging lamp, Joe was abstractedly smoothing out on his knees and reading fragments of a newspaper that had come wrapped about a side of bacon, one of Quartz's purchases. A San Fran-

cisco paper was a rare windfall in the Burro Flat cabin.

Joe pushed one big thumb through Madame Paree's chat on chic hats and, finding part of the column missing, turned to the real-estate notes. "Remarkable vitality in the Longwood Manor subdivision." "Classy new apartments on Hyde Street, et cetera."

"Jeemighty Jonah!"

Quartz leaped from his barrel chair, as if spurred by this vocal pistol shot from his partner, and came down, mad clean through.

"Say, you long-whiskered ole porky-pine! Scarin' a fella like he's been dynamited!"

Joe had his eyes glued on a paragraph, unmindful of the other's wrath. "Lissen to this, Quartz," he said:

"Work on the demolition of the old Wren Building on Battery Street, which was almost the sole surviving landmark of Argonaut days, has progressed apace. Wreckers are now taking out the old sheet-iron vaults in the basement. It is rumored that when excavation for the new skyscraper to be reared on the site commences, workers will strike the timbers of an old ship which legend places——"

Joe's reading stopped there, for so did the newspaper fragment.

Joe looked up, his eyes all alight with the old dazzle of the gold-rooting days: "Know what that means, Quartz?"

"Ain't knowin' an' ain't carin'," he replied sulkily. "An' if anybody wants to let off catamount whoops round this shack——"

The bigger partner reached above his head to dislodge the lamp from its bracket and place it in the other's wondering hands.

"Bring that light over here behindt the stove an' read what's printed there—check up on me, while I speak it to you from mem'ry." Joe's voice was trembling with excitement.

Now the shack on Burro Flat, like nine of every ten similar domiciles in the Sierras, possessed a scheme of interior decorating commendable for its utility, if not for its artistic effect. Its original builder had papered it, walls and ceiling, with San Francisco newspapers of the day, and

their dates ranged over the early 1890s. Yellowed columns of type were relieved by an occasional line drawing, with here and there, scattered over the walls, a spotty woodcut of some lady or gentleman who had been cured of a dreadful disease, without the touch of a knife.

This decorative ensemble would have no significance—indeed, there would be no story to tell—were it not for a single saving circumstance which might brand old Joe Noel as peculiar. These close-ranked columns of type on four walls were Joe's record of past events. He knew just where to find a spicy scandal, whose principals were now white-headed; knew that under the shelf containing the coffee and salt cans was spread a panoramic view of Japanese and Chinese fleets in deadly grips. Stock quotations, on holes in the ground long since admitted worthless, were his familiar reading.

With certain of the more exciting news items of thirty years gone—these were his favorites—Joe Noel's interest had even prompted him to memorize the text completely. He had discovered that there was no better way to break tedium of ten years on Burro Flat. It was to one of these embalmed episodes that he now directed his partner's attention:

"'The Old Wren Building Made of Stone Brought From China, and A Sketch of the Bark, *Sister Jane*.' That's what it says under those pictures there." Joe was pacing the floor of the shack, his eyes closed in concentration upon his task of recitation.

"And now this here's the way she runs in that first column: 'When the lusty young city by the Golden Gate began moving its sand hills into the bay and pushing its water front, block by block, out over old tide lines, the first decaying hulk to be buried by the dump carts was the bark, *Sister Jane*, a Yankee ship in the China trade, which had been driven ashore in a gale when deserted by her captain and crew in the early '50s.'"

Quartz Mettick, squinting at the ancient newspaper columns which the lamp revealed, followed line by line the sonorous chant of his partner, punctuated as it was by the occasional booming of an interpolated, "Pee-riod!"

"There must be tr-r-reasure in that buried hulk of the *Sister Jane*, rumor buzzed, when Thaddeus Wren of Sag Harbor, the vessel's owner, came out via Panama to find his craft buried under twenty feet of sand and proceeded forthwith to the erection of San Francisco's first stone building on the site. The gossips whispered that Wren was building a strong box over his buried gold."

"Gold!" Joe's throaty rumble dwelt lovingly on the word, as he continued his recitative: "'Gold slugs of fifty dollars denomination, such as were minted by California before the coin of the Union could be brought into perfect circulation, are rumored to have been in the *Sister Jane's* strong room when the vessel was driven, a hulk, on the city's water front and subsequently covered. Did a rascally captain know this treasure had been abandoned when he and his crew deserted the ship for the mines, or——'"

Old Joe Noel continued without a fumble, through two close-set columns of some poor hack's wild dreams. Then: "Come set down here, Quartz, an' tell me what you think about it all?"

"Think you're frayin' out at the top. You're gittin' all steamed up over some writin' fool's pipe dream." Quartz delivered this diagnosis heavily over his renewed pipe.

His partner's eyes launched lightnings. "Pipe dream—nothin'! I've knowed these facts I just spoke for you—an' you checkin' up on me true—goin' on ten years. 'Long comes this piece writ in the paper only two or three weeks ago"—he shook the fragment of bacon wrapping under Quartz's nose truculently—"which proves every word pasted over behindt the stove."

"Allowin' it do, which I don't," snapped the other, "what's it to you? How's a lot of buried gold slugs in a Frisco cellar basement goin' to favor a crazy ditch tender away up here on Burro Flat? Answer me that!"

Temperature was rising in that twelve-by-twelve mausoleum of dead talk. Each partner recognized the storm signals and headed into the wind. Several times a year they just had to have a reg'lar knock-down-an'-drag-out row.

"Looky here, Quartz." Joe tried to make his tone sound patient, but failed. "Here's two sets of facts—one which's been on this wall here like's not thirty an' more years; tother comes wropped around a hunk of sowbelly, jus' this afternoon. They dovetails, these two sets of facts does. Likely I'm the only man in California what's got 'em both to hand."

"So what do I hafta do but get me down to Frisco an' dig a couple shafts down into those timbers of that *Sister Jane* ship before——"

"An' git yourself arrested fer a nut," Quartz supplied. "You, which ain't never been farther away than Sacramento, hoppin' yourself into the big town to prowl an' cat-walk yourself in some cellar basement, where you don't belong. When they takes you to the po-lice station, you say you're lookin' fer buried gold. Oh, mamma!"

At the end of another five minutes of conversation, Joe Noel went to his bunk, swept his blankets under his arm, and took them to spread on a gathered heap of pine needles out under the big jack pine beyond the shack door. So it had been over the ten years of their partnership. On occasions of strain, such as this, one or the other of the disputants settled argument by moving out.

Always over the next-morning's coffee their quarrel was patched by a diffident handclasp and some appropriate profanity. But this time it was different. The following morning old Joe brewed his coffee in a stew pan, crisped his bacon over an outdoor fire, and then shouldered his shovel and stalked away to his day's job, without a word to his partner within the shack. Nor did the ratty little scoffer at high dreams of wealth hold out any white flag. He rattled his skillet with provocative insolence, and when he saw Joe stride off down the ditch line, he betook himself down trail to his gravel mine, in the canyon below the flat.

Quartz Mettick plugged down the canyon side to the mouth of the tunnel, mad clear through. He pushed the old ore car down the track into well-conned darkness, lighted the candles at the farthest breast in the gravel of a prehistoric river bed, and began swinging a single-jack

maul. Then, blow by blow, crept upon old Quartz Mettick that dread distemper called the "miner's curse."

Gold! Gold hidden under a Frisco building site! Well, suckers had found gold on mountaintops, where wise guys wouldn't think of looking for it. Green-horns had blown away whalin' big boulders with little pecks of black powder and uncovered pockets of fat nuggets, fit to make your eyes bulge.

"Gold lies where you find it," some wise guy once said. An' here was crazy Joe Noel, claimin' to have the plans and specifications of a gold deposit pasted up behind the stove, all these years, and only waiting for the key, like you might say, to prove location.

"'S all bosh!" Old Quartz lifted the trap in his stope and let a load of gravel roar down the chute into the waiting car. "Moonshine an' flapdoodle!"

But there, in the candle-pointed darkness, the little microbes of the miner's curse multiplied in his brain and increased their steady gnawing. Gold in fifty-dollar slugs! Gold buried in an old ship!

Quartz toiled up the mountainside to the shack that night, prepared to be "reasonable" with his partner; to go over with him again the evidence pasted behind the stove. But, to his great surprise, Joe was not approachable. The big fellow came stalking in, greeted Quartz with a high-headed snort, and took his share of grub and cooking tools out under the jack pine. Quartz Mettick slammed shut the shack door and went to the stove to brew his supper in high anger.

After he had scoured his skillet with ashes and tidied up, the little gravel burrower did a strange thing. He pinned a sheet of paper securely across the shack's only window, dropped the hasps over front and back door latches, and then took the swinging lamp down from its bracket. With this to light him, Quartz tiptoed back of the stove to where the yellowed record of secret treasure was pasted, and there in security he read it thrice over.

For the first time in a ten-year partnership the two old-timers of Burro Flat let a second sun go down on their wrath.

Or was it wrath? Say, maybe, gold lust had driven its wedge of suspicion and craft into a tried friendship.

When, on the third night of this unwonted strain, Joe Noel returned from his ditch march, he found the cabin empty, with Quartz's blankets and gold pan gone. Madly he clambered down the trail to his partner's tunnel. Maybe—just maybe—the old pine weasel'd gone an' got hisself caught in a cave-in.

"Quartz! Oh, you Quartz!"

He found the old ore car padlocked to its track, and the heavy door to the tunnel closed under a chain.

Then, lightning clear, the truth burned him. Quartz Mettick had double-crossed him! Quartz Mettick had lit out for the big town and the cache of gold about to be uncovered with the buried timbers of the *Sister Jane*. Of all the double-dyed sheep in a ki-yote's skin—

It was a whole agonizing week before old Joe, feeling himself bound by his trust to the power company, could get a relief man to take his place on the ditch line. Then on a blessed night he dug up three hundred dollars in gold coin from its bank deposit at the foot of the old jack pine and strode over a darkling trail for the nearest railroad point. A train came roaring through the snowsheds, to pause in its flight for the accommodation of Joe Noel, Argonaut.

BATTERY STREET, down in the wholesale district of San Francisco, has its nights to itself. It is a place of sheet-iron shutters, closing cloistered silences; a place of ghostly perspectives, outlined by pin-point lights far apart. Only the play boys of the fog have it for their recreation ground—oddly twisted spirals and changing shapes of vapor that go skittering around corners, on a never-ending game of Jack-in-the-Corner. A far call from that riotous time of the '50s, when the whole length of Battery Street was nuzzled by figureheads of all the world's merchant ships.

On an August night, when trixy fog phantoms were at play there, a random patrolman had paused by a jury railing, spanning a gulf beyond the sidewalk, to peer down at a tiny watchman's fire

in the bottom of the pit. He passed on his beat, convinced that his jurisdiction was not subterranean. The fog wraiths danced on. One, a little more substantial than his fellows, skipped across the street from a doorway and slid noiselessly down an inclined ramp used by the dirt trucks of the excavators.

This exploring specter wavered hesitantly amid pools of stale-water seepage and bulking shadows of the cement foundation. The tiny watchman's fire flickered at a distance, its timid light revealing a strange skeleton formation of timbers splaying out under the sheer drop of the Battery Street wall—something like a whale's ribs skewed up from a great vertebra, half buried in sand.

A thin sound, as of a shovel against sand. The fog bogle moved closer to the wall of the excavation. Out of a hole in that twenty-foot rampart came the legs, then the shoulders, and at last the head of a man. He dragged after him an egg crate, filled with sand.

"Evenin' to you, *Mister Mettick!*"

Quartz Mettick toppled back on his haunches in a stagnant pool and, sitting there quietly, looked up to see a twist of fog materialize into a broad-brimmed hat and whiskers, both hauntingly familiar.

"Joe!"

"I guess *Mister Noel* is 'propriate," spoke the apparition. "Short names is used only between true an' steady partners, that same bein' by custom established."

Little Quartz lifted himself from the salt-water puddle and stumbled forward, his right hand held out.

"Joe, bless your ole soul! 'Come an' give a look at the timberin' I've done in *our* tunnel. Packin' boxes I picked up along this Battery Street place fer the hangin' wall an' pieces of ribs from the *Sister Jane* makin' the supports. She's a looloo!"

There was intuitive psychology for you! One old miner covering the sting of moral obliquity with a lure for another old miner's professional enthusiasm. Joe Noel balked, as a covering gesture for his wounded sensibilities:

"Looks to me like I might have the

least smitch of interest in another man's workin' of a claim which I holds the exclusive rights onto."

Quartz took the rebuke squarely: "Joe, ole side partner, let's figure this thing fair. We has a row over this proposition of gold buried in a Frisco buildin' lot. Looks to you like I'm all agin' it. After figurin' it all out, I'm willin' to whack in with you on the proposition, but you won't talk.

"Quartz," says I to myself, 'you hop down there to Frisco an' establish prior rights, while Joe's gittin' his release from the ditch job; him followin' when he can.' Which I does. Ain't nothin' double-handed in that, what I can see."

"Well——" Joe hesitated. "Well, I dunno——"

Just then a wavering shadow rose up beyond the whale's ribs—something very tenuous and unsubstantial, which started rapidly to efface itself behind a near-by steam shovel. Quartz hailed: "Oh, Toy Chu! 'S all right."

The scarecrow in the fog hesitated, then came silently through the ship's timbers to where the reunited partners stood. The firelight showed Joe Noel the midget shape and pinched features of a very old Chinaman—old as a leathery tortoise. The little yellow man stood before him, hands buried in wide sleeves of his outlandish jacket, head ducked forward in that attitude of humility the old-time California Chinaman learned at hard pains to bear toward the lordly whites who ruled.

"Joe," Quartz essayed clumsy introduction, "this's a li'l' chink, Toy Chu, who beat us both to this prospect—though gosh knows how he come by his hunch. When I gets the job of night watchman here a week ago, I find him runnin' a two-by-four tunnel into the bank, like any gopher hole."

Joe Noel might overlook his old partner's rather seedy explanation of an ugly situation between them; but when it came to finding a Chinaman on the claim—and apparently by Quartz's tacit consent—that was running it rather strong. He scowled at the yellow man.

"Looky here, chink——"

"Me no digum fo' gol," Toy Chu an-

ticipated shrewdly. "Mo' bettah me find some'n' else."

Joe turned a puzzled face to his partner.

"There y'are, Joe," Quartz supplied. "Like he tells me—'Mo' bettah find some'n' else.' Crazy, of course. When you see his peewee tunnel, timbered with nothin' but macaroni boxes and pieces of chink basket, an' like to cave on him any time, you'll agree with me. But I let him stick round fer company. The nights are lonely, down in these diggings."

"Clazy!" chirped Toy Chu and scuttered back to his tunnel. Joe Noel dismissed the Chinaman from his mind and turned to more important matters.

"Main question is, have you found a color yet?"

"Nary a trace, Joe," regretfully replied Quartz; "an' me coarse-screenin' every boxful of dirt I've brung out from my tunnel—runnin' it through a plasterer's sand sifter I borrowed off'n a new building over on Howard Street."

Joe took a step to peer into the four-foot bore, whence Quartz had emerged but a few minutes before, a neatly timbered hole into the Battery Street wall of the excavation, which had the keel timbers of the old ship for its flooring. "How's the vein head?" he asked of his crony.

"Well, sir, looks like when they buried this *Sister Jane* ship, she lay head under the street and tail end under the building lot, which that feller Wren bought fer his stone building. Before some walkin' delegate shut down the steam-shovel gang here, a week ago, they'd uncovered what you see—fifty-six feet of skeleton."

"I've drove 'bout twelve feet of tunnel in along the keel. It's slow work, 'count of me havin' to do my timberin' quiet like, so's nobody up on Battery Street gets nosey. I reckon that gold must lie——"

"An' that chink's tunnel?" Joe interrupted.

"Oh, he's diddlin' a li'l' hole, ten feet, over yonder and higher'n mine, like he would strike what you'd call the deck timbers of the *Sister Jane*."

Joe Noel pondered heavily. He walked the length of the exposed ribs, all knocked

askew by the steam shovel's dipper, and back to join his partner.

"You're both wrong," was his terse decision.

Quartz bristled:

"Wrong? How d'you figger that? Ain't I done enough gravel mining to know my business?"

The big fellow bent a pitying look upon the midget. "Any *real* miner, who's cleaned up as many riffles as you have, ought to know gold is heavier'n sand—all the more when it comes molded in fifty-dollar slugs. So what's the use runnin' a tunnel *through* the ole *Sister Jane's* bones, when the gold lies *under* 'em?"

"Under 'em—nothin'!" little Quartz snorted, his professional pride touched to the quick. "When this ship run ashore here, she carried the gold *in* her, didn't she—not *under* her?"

The fog sprites up on Battery Street heard Joe Noel's scratchy whine of irritation: "An' when she broke up—even when those ole-timers dumped twenty feet of sand onto her, and her timbers rotted away—wasn't there enough seepage water—look at it all round you—to work through an' wash that heavy gold down under the wreck?"

Now the recently reunited partners had their faces scant inches apart and were talking themselves into a fine rage.

Quartz 'Mettick took Joe's aspersions to be personal assaults upon his reputation as a mining authority. As for Joe Noel, every word his old friend uttered helped sweep away his recent acceptance of a lame excuse to cover a shabby trick, and convinced him the more that Quartz was a skunk.

"Looky here, Joe Noel, I'm a special officer guarding this propity. I c'd have you pinched if I jus' said the word."

"An' you lissen to me, you low-down water snake: Do that li'l' thing, an' the whole secret of the gold cache here becomes public!"

Compromise was forced by this stalemate. Joe solemnly paced away from Quartz's tunnel mouth, twenty steps to the farthest up-tilted rib. "This here marks my claim," he thundered. "You an' the chink can tunnel yourselves clean to China, fer all I care."

THAT Battery Street, which in the daytime lives in the clangor of trucks and the beat of many feet on pavements, gave itself o' nights to contemplation of a comedy played deep down in the pit marking the exhumed grave of the *Sister Jane*. Three old men, two white and one yellow, pecking and haggling around and under the rotted bones of a vessel strangely translated inland. Three old men were working like gray muzzled rats, securely away from the sight of a crowded city.

Two of these old men hated each other fiercely—hated with a strength which represented the sad converse of long years of affection. They came with the dark and the creeping fog, each from his separate holing-out place, amid the cheap lodging houses beyond Mission Street. They worked—one in his tunnel, the other at his open sluice amid the salt-water pools—without a word or a look for one another.

So much for the tricks lust of gold can conjure.

As for the third in this trio of phantoms, little Toy Chu, who looked for something better than gold, the heart of a gentle philosopher beat under his shabby denim tunic. For, as he wriggled in and out of his macaroni-box tunnel, filling and dragging out to empty a battered wicker basket, he surely probed the cause of strife between the two white men and was grieved thereby. On the third night of hostilities, old Joe Noel was sitting dejectedly by his pile of combed-over sand, when Toy Chu approached him timidly. He squatted at a respectful distance, filled, and lighted an acorn pipe.

"You no catchum gol' yet?"

"No, chinky," wearily answered Joe.

"Why for tly catchum gol'?" Toy Chu purred insinuatingly over his pipe stem. "Ole man no hab good from gol'. Flendship mo' bettah for ole man. Yeh, I t'ink so."

The little yellow tortoise sucked noisily on his pipe and, casting a covert eye to where the firelight showed him a sober face, he dared go on:

"Ole man, allee same Toy Chu, soon makee finish. Mo' bettah leave behin'

happy flendship than gol'. Gol' him makee allee time plenty touble."

Joe lifted his shoulders, as if to ease a weight. Then quizzically to Toy Chu: "What you diggin' for, chinky, if it ain't for gold?"

The Chinaman pondered his answer for some moments. "Maybeso I dig for flendship—flendship of dead mans. Somet'ing b'long dead mans long time ago, back China side, one time bad mans makee steal. Maybeso Toy Chu catchum here."

"Well, chinky, I hope you find it—that 'flendship' thing," Joe arose with a slope-shouldered weariness and picked up his shovel. The withered little yellow man knocked out his pipe and gave Joe Noel his heartiest chirp:

"Toy Chu hope you goo' luck for find somet'ing mo' bettah than gol'."

THE fog was turning pearly gray with the first light of dawn when Joe Noel's shovel blade, edging along a fragment of buried keel, struck something hard and turned. "Nother of them whalin' big spikes," Joe petulantly muttered and got down to grope with his hands. Fingers closed about a rim of metal. He drove them deeper into the sand and traced a metallic plane.

Old Joe's heart gave a leap, as he seized his shovel and commenced a frantic burrowing. Inside of five minutes he had a crusted iron box, some two feet square, out of his shallow shaft and moved over into the zone of firelight. There was no hasp to the cover, and the shovel blade provided leverage to move it slowly from its resting place.

Then in this high moment old Joe forgot his feud with Quartz. He clambered crazily through the ship's ribs to encounter his partner just backing out of his tunnel.

"Quartz!" he said, in a hoarse whisper. "I struck it!"

Trembling, the two old men knelt by the iron box. Joe pried off its cover. A thin smear of sand was revealed within. When eager fingers scraped that away, wisps of rotten silk came with it. Then—not the gold slugs of their fevered dreams—no seductive glimmer of golden

bars. No; a flat plate of green-black stone, as thin as a book cover; beneath that, five similar plates, which rang with a silvery bell note, as they struck the metal sides of the box upon being lifted to the light. The fire flicker showed the faces of these six green leaves polished to the sheen of hot marrow; each surface was all finely chased in gold—gold inlay of graven characters, ranged in close perpendicular rows.

"Chink writing!" Utter disgust registered in Joe's exclamation.

"An' writ on stone, too," Quartz added. "Nobody but a crazy chink'd think of writin' on stone."

For a long minute the twain sat there before the winking old script on which the firelight played. Both felt disappointment as actual physical weakness. Then Quartz:

"Well, partner, we're stung! But, say, mebbe this is what that li'l Toy Chu's been diggin' after. Let's——"

They went together through the dark to summon the Chinaman from his burrow. It was dark against the face of the high bank where Toy Chu's tunnel mouth should be—so dark, they could not find it.

When Joe brought a burning brand from the fire they found only a heavy cone of sand dropping down the face of the cliff to mark the spot where a cave-in had buried Toy Chu—a few ends of macaroni box poked through the confusing litter.

Little Toy Chu, who strove to win the friendship of dead men, was now himself one of that great company.

IT was the night after the funeral of Toy Chu, and Chinatown had not witnessed a more elaborate one since the burial of "Little Pete," king of the gamblers, thirty years before.

Joe Noel and Quartz Mettick, in rented dress suits—dreadfully uncomfortable—were guests of honor of the Golden Six Brotherhood at a banquet served in the Celestial fraternity's lodge rooms on Clay Street—old Joe Noel and old Quartz Mettick, so dazed by the roaring of the newspapers, by the black headlines over pictures of themselves on pink-and-green

pages—"Wren Building Argonauts Uncover Treasure"—that they did not know whether they were afoot or on horseback.

There they sat at a banquet, with a hundred smiling yellow faces ringed about them; with shark's fins and pickled sea slugs and all kinds of strange food in a hundred little dishes before them. And set in a new shrine, at the far end of the banquet hall—a frame of flaming red silk and rosettes of gold paper—stood six thin tablets of green-black jade, all picked out with gold frost of ideographs—their find under the keel of the *Sister Jane!*

A little man in formal evening dress and heavy rimmed goggles—he was the Chinese vice consul—stands beside the two old-timers. He pats his bow tie and picks precise English out of the air, and he says:

"Gentlemen: Through you the sacrifice which our brother, Toy Chu, makes to our illustrious ancestors, bears fruit. You have restored to our Golden Six Brotherhood, a very ancient fraternity, the ancestral tablets of the original six bonded brothers who founded our Heaven-blessed association—tablets stolen in Canton by a Yankee shipmaster in the year 1851.

"Gentlemen, we read in the papers that you have been searching for gold bars of California mintage, when the spirits of our ancestors direct you to find, instead, their sacred tablets. It happens that the treasury of Golden Six Brotherhood has been intact since the year 1850, not disturbed by fire, by panic, by robbers. And that treasury contains something. We hear spirits of our ancestors speak from those tablets which you see now restored to their shrine. They command something to us."

The speaker clapped his hands. Two silk-coated servants carried to the table and set before the honor guests a teakwood chest covered with a drape of peacock silk. The vice consul whisked off the brocade and tipped back the chest's lid.

Gold in minted bars—in little glimmering shoes roughly molded! Gold of the Argonauts lay ranked there in tiers of richness against black satin. The dream

of a yellowed page pasted behind the stove on Burro Flat come true!

"Gentlemen, the unworthy gift to you of the Golden Six Brotherhood——"

The two old partners looked down at heaped treasure until their imagination ached. Old Joe Noel then slowly turned his head to find and hold the eyes of old

Quartz Mettick. Under the table their hands gripped together. Whispered old Joe:

"He said—the li'l' chink—somethin' about friendship—for old men like you an' me—bein' better than gold."

"He was damn tootin'," whispered back old Quartz.



DIAMOND PRODUCTION

THE Transvaal diamond rush which took place some months since was literally a rush. Nothing comparable to it has happened in this country since the government distributed free agricultural lands in Oklahoma, a generation ago.

At that time there was an actual race for choice homesteads in the former Indian reservation, and there was a similar sprint to reach the coveted diamond territory on the Grasfontein Farm. From the starting point to the farm was an actual distance of three miles, and it was a free-for-all race, since the motor car presented a handicap rather than an advantage among the thousands of racers.

The South African government in proclaiming the new diamond fields ran counter to the representations of the big interests. Although there is no danger of an overproduction of diamonds, the Grasfontein fields, it is said, will be the last to be thrown open to individual wind and limb for some time to come.

The value of all the diamonds in the world is put at three billion dollars, of which half is held in the United States. The average production of diamonds each year in the South African fields is less than forty million dollars. The output from year to year is drastically regulated by the producers, whose fears that there may be a glut in the market seem somewhat exaggerated to a layman. After all, South Africa's production of wool is worth three times its production of diamonds, and no man needs a diamond, but every man needs wool.



LONDON CHURCHES

BY an overwhelming vote of the House of Commons, one hundred and twenty-four to twenty-seven, nineteen famous old London churches were saved for posterity. These churches were virtually without congregations as the result of the disappearance of the resident population from the center of the city. They occupy valuable sites, and the National Assembly of the Church of England two years ago voted to demolish them and sell the ground plots. Four months ago the House of Lords indorsed the decision of the National Assembly.

Lovers of old architecture rose in arms. The friends of the old structures, many of them fine examples of seventeenth-century building, brought pressure to bear upon the Commons, with the result that lovers of old London can still look with pleasure upon the graceful spires designed by Sir Christopher Wren. This is a gratifying decision not only to Englishmen but to all Americans who have sat down to rest in the churchyards of these lovely-old fanes.

When Louis Napoleon, in his zeal to make Paris a bigger and better city, ruthlessly destroyed whole streets of eighteenth-century buildings, and Hausmannized the right bank of the French capital, he committed a crime against the past for which no improvements can atone. The Roman virtue of piety, which made the present guardian of all the treasures of the past, has too little appreciation in our modern lives. We have many good modern architects, but no Sir Christopher Wren.



The Nine of Spades

By Philip Kerby

Author of "Destiny's Side Kick," Etc.

Only one thing about the death of Deacon Caleb Brown was certain—or almost certain. He had been shot. But there was no discoverable way in which he could have been shot, and the affair remained a mystery until—
But we'll let the deacon's neighbor, an old retired sea dog, tell the story.

THE older I grow the more I am convinced that sooner or later we have to pay for our sins right here and now. It's not a new thought. Other folks have thought it before, and probably many more will think it in the future. There may be a hot hell or a cool and comfortable heaven prepared for each one of us. After death, we may be separated into sheep and goats, just as the evangelist says, but nobody knows. So why worry? There's enough hot hell right here to keep folks from worrying too much about the future, and as for revenge—well, the good Lord seems perfectly capable to handle that end of it, Himself. No disrespect, either. But it's just as the Bible says—"Revenge is the Lord's."

I expect it's the excitement we've been having in our town for the last ten days that has got me to thinking. More ex-

citement than three Fourth of Julys rolled into one and a close election for the board of selectmen. My picture even appeared in the Boston papers, and not in the patent-medicine advertisements, either. Emmy said to-night before supper that, if any more of these city reporters scattered cigarette ashes on our sitting-room rug, just so they could interview me, she'd demand a divorce. But down underneath I think Emmy's just a mite proud. Me? Shucks—no! I'm too tired to be proud. Thought I'd just have another pipeful before turning in. Certainly—help yourself, right over there in the chest. I'm not given to cigars, but I bought some for the reporters.

You say you're not a regular reporter? A feature writer, eh? Something like what a marine appraiser is to an insurance clerk? I thought so, but I'm rightly surprised you heard of our murder all

the way down to New York. Up here on the Cape, we don't have as many murders as you folks. The only other one I remember was over to Truro, when a couple of "Portugees" knifed each other. But that was fifteen years ago. No, on the whole we're a pretty peaceable people, and it's only when the Lord takes a hand that we have a sure-enough sensation. Got a match? Thanks.

LET'S see, this is Saturday. Well, it was a week ago last Thursday that it happened. Emmy and me were sitting in this room, just as you and I be now, only, instead of smoking, we were playing double solitaire—over there by the bay window. Ever play solitaire? No? Too bad; great game for the nerves. Emmy beat me the first game, and, as I was shuffling the cards for the next set-to, Emmy remarked that Deacon Caleb Brown had come back from Hyannis. I looked over, and sure enough there was the deacon in his sitting room. We watched him take off his ulster and coonskin cap, but instead of hanging them up in the hall, he threw them over a chair. He looked up at the lamp, which was smoking, and turned the wick down, then set himself down at the table and pulled out a wallet full of papers which he began to sort.

"More of his six-per-cent notes," says Emmy. "I don't see why folks always has to borrow money from the deacon. He's the meanest man in the State, I do believe."

"Well, we don't owe him nothing," I says, going back to my shuffling.

"Who saved it so we don't?"

"You, my dear. Without you I'd been in the poorhouse long ago." Emmy just sniffed, but I could see that she was pleased.

"When he made us pay a bonus, just because we paid off our mortgage sooner than he expected, I could have choked him cheerfully," she retorted.

"Sh! Emmy," I said, "that's not Christian talk. It was only business. He had right to it, for it said so in the fine print that we never bothered reading."

"Just the same," said Emmy, "he's an old skinflint."

To stop the argument I began dealing the cards, and Emmy forgot the deacon when three aces showed first crack out of the box. I kind of lost interest in the game and looked over at the deacon. He looked old, and I knew he was cold, because there hadn't been a fire in his house for more than a week. We've had a right bitter winter, and, until these last two days of warm weather, every morning I've had to break the ice in the pitcher afore I could wash.

While Emmy went ahead with her game, I took to watching the deacon. I saw him get up and go over to the corner cupboard and take out one of his long copper tubes which held the various survey maps of the county. The deacon always saved fees on title abstracts and did the proving himself, before he accepted a mortgage. After he took out the map from its tube, he picked up his overcoat from the chair and put it around his shoulders, drawing it close, as if he were pretty shivery. Then he sat down and spread the map out on the table.

A little while later I heard the deacon's gate click, and Sport come barking up the path, so I knew that Jabez Fowler, who tends the deacon's furnace, had probably seen his lights and come over to make a fire. Jabez was married last June to Cap'n 'Zekiel Smith's daughter, over to Weymouth.

I've known the Fowlers all my life. Me and Jabez's father, Absolom, went to school together over to Hyannisport. We used to call him "Solly," which made him powerful mad. He had red hair just like Jabez's, and he was as obstinate as time. I sailed under him for several voyages in the old *Nancy M.*, carrying lumber from Bath to Charleston. At the end of one voyage he calmly up and announced he was going to marry Mary Adams that lived in our town. I was kind of sweet on Mary myself, but I never stood a chance after Absolom told me where to head in. I just sort of got into the habit of obeying him, and when it came to Mary—well, I took my orders; that's all there was to it. Mary ruled him, though. He was a different man ashore after he got hitched. She told him that he might be master aboard his lumber

bark, but she wasn't going to have any muddy feet tramping into her kitchen. Then along came Jabez, named after his grandfather, the elder in the First Presbyterian Church. Maybe you've heard tell of him? No? He was a tartar, too!

THEN Absolom went down with his ship in a January weather breeder, off Cape Ann. Must be nearly fifteen years ago. He was too damn obstinate to take in a reef. Thought he could teach the Lord His business.

It was pretty hard on Mary, with Jabez to bring up, but she never complained. She just tied her apron a mite tighter and announced that she was going to take in boarders to keep Jabez at school. Emmy and me used to go around of a Sunday to see how she was making out, and Emmy usually took along some of her quince preserve. The only time I ever see her worried was when Jabez would get into a fight at school. He was always a bit undersized and forever picking scraps with boys twice his years. He seemed always to get the worst of it, but never a whimper out of him. He inherited all of his father's temper and obstinacy, plus his mother's stiff upper lip. He was smart, too—smarter than most boys of his age.

When he was fifteen, he came to me and asked would I get him a berth at sea. I said I'd think it over, and next Sunday, when me and Emmy went over to see Mary, I asked her what she thought about Jabez shipping before the mast. She went first gray, then as white as the tablecloth, as she choked and left the table. I sent Emmy into the kitchen for her. After a little while Emmy came back and said Mary was all broke up, since this was the first that she had heard of Jabez's wish. I felt kind of funny, myself—kind of chokylike—because I thought, of course, Jabez had told her first. But it seems he hadn't. Nary a word.

I went out and found Jabez in the woodshed smoking corn silk. Right then and there I gave him the licking of his life. When we'd both calmed down, we had a long talk in the twilight, and Jabez gave me his solemn promise that he'd

never go to sea as long as his mother lived. We shook hands on it and then went back into the house to do justice to Mary's hot biscuits. Jabez took his mother aside and told her what he'd promised me, and after that we had one of the jolliest evenings I ever remember. I never see Mary so chirked up since Absolom's death.

Got another match? This pipe of mine's foundered. Thanks. That's better.

After Jabez finished school I got him a job in "Doc" Wilson's drug store, and the doc promised to teach him to be a pill pounder. He got interested in chemistry and used to try to make worse smells than the doc. Succeeded, too, for all I know. Mary was mighty proud of him. They didn't have to take boarders any more, because Jabez was making enough to keep them both. Their happiness lasted only about a year, though. After ailing only a week, Mary joined Absolom. Pneumonia it was. Jabez walked back to town between Emmy and me after the funeral. He seemed all in—just plumb tuckered out. Emmy made him come in, and she gave him some hot tea and then made him go to bed in our spare room. He slept the clock around. 'Twas the best thing for him.

After supper the next night we had another long talk, and the upshot of it was that he decided to move over and board with us for a spell, and rent his mother's house, which would help pay off the mortgage to the deacon. Neither of us ever mentioned his going to sea, because he was already keeping company with Captain Zeke's daughter, Alice.

During the year and a half that followed, I got mighty fond of Jabez. He seemed just like a son. His mother's death seemed to have calmed him down a whole lot—that and Alice, who some ways was mighty like his mother. She was pretty high strung, herself, and wasn't one to take any nonsense.

Jabez never seemed to do so well with his house. His tenants only stayed four or five months or so, and they were always wanting some new-fangled improvements. He got behind in his interest payments, and the deacon began to nag him.

About that time Jabez and Alice decided to get married and live in the house, themselves. Emmy and me were mighty sorry to lose Jabez, but married they were by a minister—to please Alice—and moved back into the old house on the hill that Absalom Fowler bought when he married Mary.

Alice decided to refurnish—it's a way brides have—and Jabez was put to it to make both ends meet. Then there were doctor's bills. Jabez himself made the medicine, but even so it took all he could earn to pay expenses. The deacon began acting nasty again about his interest payments, and, although it went against the grain, Jabez and him patched up a dicker whereby Jabez tended his furnace, night and morning, but, instead of getting any pay, the deacon credited Jabez a certain sum each month on what he owed. How much it was I don't know. But not much. I know the deacon.

IT seemed like all the pleasure Jabez got out of life was playing with Sport, a little fox terrier, smart as a whip. Alice used to tell Emmy that the only person she was ever jealous of was Sport. So when I heard Sport come barking up the deacon's path, a week ago Thursday, I knew Jabez wasn't very far away.

Then I heard the cellar door creak on its hinges and Jabez calling to Sport to be quiet. But, instead of keeping quiet, he only barked the louder; maybe he thought he was chasing a cat; I don't know. You could hear Jabez shaking the furnace grate and then a little later shoveling in coal, and every few minutes he'd stop and call to Sport to shut up.

About fifteen minutes later I see that fool pup come dashing into the living room, barking his head off. He scampered around the table, where the deacon was going over his papers and maps. The deacon shouted at him, but Sport never stopped barking. Just seemed to be enjoying the game. Then the deacon rose slowly from his chair and gave Sport a vicious kick in the ribs, knocking him into the hall. Sport howled with pain.

Jabez came running up from the cellar and picked Sport up in his arms and began patting him, soft like a woman. Sport

tried to lick his ribs, where the deacon's hobnailed boot landed, and Jabez started cursing the deacon. Emmy and me couldn't hear a word of what he said, and perhaps it was just as well that the windows were down tight, because Jabez had a powerful vocabulary when roused. The deacon swung round behind the table and picked up an iron inkwell to defend himself. Then he pointed toward the door. What Jabez told him I never yet have found out; but, anyway, Jabez left, and we next heard him running down the gravel path. Emmy called to him to come in, but he just kept on running, with Sport in his arms.

I hadn't left my seat and was watching the deacon, who moved on tiptoe toward the door and threw the bolt. And then he came over and peered out across the lawn toward our house. I was sitting in the shadow of the bay window, so I don't think he saw me. He then locked both windows and pulled down the shades, but he pulled down the second shade so violently that it broke its moorings and came tumbling about his head. He fought free from it and flung it over in a corner. Then he wiped his hands nervously, fixed his tie, brushed off his clothes, and sat down before his papers and maps again. Emmy came back from the front door, all of a twitter, and wanted me to go over immediately.

I hesitated; first of all, because rightly speaking we should have been minding our own business and not watching our neighbors' affairs; and, secondly, because I thought it might get Jabez into a worse mess. Things were bad enough already without a third party mixing in. She then thought I ought to go up to the drug store to see how Jabez was making out, but I told her he was probably so busy bathing Sport's bruises that he wouldn't relish callers none. At last she agreed with me and went out to the kitchen to make a cup of camomile tea to steady our nerves before we played a final rubber.

We fought the next rubber tooth and nail. Twice I thought Emmy was going to run out on me, but each time there was a nine of spades in the way that she couldn't get rid of.

"If I were superstitious," Emmy says, "and believed in fortunes, I'd say that there was trouble coming to somebody soon. But, thank my stars, I'm not superstitious!"

The ship's clock in the hall sounded five bells. Emmy sat up with a start, declaring she had no idea it was half past ten, nearly an hour past our bed time. Said she supposed it had been the excitement and all. With that we both turned, and looked over at the deacon.

He'd fallen asleep over his maps. His head was resting on his left arm, and his right arm was stretched out on top of his pile of notes and papers. Emmy said it would be right neighborly to go over and wake him before he caught cold, but I quoted the old saw about letting sleeping dogs lie. She said something about good Samaritans being few and far between, and she went upstairs to bed, while I went down to fix the furnace.

I found a lot of clinkers that had to be removed from the furnace grate, and what with pulling them out and banking the fire and doing several little off chores, it was about half an hour before I came upstairs. As I was raiding the cooky jar in the pantry, Emmy called to me that the deacon was still asleep, and told me again to go over and wake him. I poked my head out of the side door and found it was bitter cold, and, since I only had a pair of knitted slippers on, I decided that if I went out I would probably catch my death of dampness. Anyway, I saw occasional sparks coming out of the deacon's chimney, and I knew that Jabez had probably put on an extra amount of coal to warm the house clear through.

It took me a long while to get to sleep. I rolled and tossed and counted sheep and cursed Emmy's rich walnut cookies. Just as I'd be on the verge of dropping off, I'd open my eyes and see the light from the deacon's lamp streaming across the yard, and then I'd wonder if I hadn't better get up and tell him it was bedtime.

THE next morning, both Emmy and me overslept. I woke up, with her shaking me by the shoulder and telling me that she was sure that something dread-

ful had happened, because the deacon was still in the same position as we'd seen him the night before, and that the lamp was still lit. I looked out and sure enough he was—although slumped down some. I threw on some clothes, hurried across the yard, pounded at the deacon's back door, waited a minute or two, pounded again, and shouted. I tried the handle, but found the door locked.

I cursed myself for a fool for not coming over the night before and ran around to the front door, only to find it locked, too, and the key on the inside. I shouted louder than ever. Doc Wilson, who was driving by on his morning rounds, pulled up at the curb and asked me if I was trying to raise the dead.

"I might be, and then again I mightn't," I answered and beckoned him to come along and told him hurriedly about the deacon. He rushed around to the side door and pounded, while I pounded at the front.

Emmy stuck her head out of the window and shouted that we were both idiots, and that we should go in by the cellar door, which she could see was open. So we did.

"Fire's nearly out," said the doc. "Don't look as if Jabez had tended it this morning."

At his mention of Jabez, I went cold all over. All sorts of thoughts skipped through my brain, as we pumped up the cellar stairs and opened the door into the hall, calling the deacon.

We tried the sitting-room door, but found it locked, and then beat upon the stout oak panels. There was no answer. The doc pulled off his cap, scratched his bald spot, and made a wry face.

"If we break down this door, according to law we're guilty of trespass, and the deacon would like nothing better than to law us both from hell to high water. I think, to be on the safe side, I'll mosey over in my flivver and get the sheriff with a warrant, so that everything will be legal. You wait here. I'll be as quick as I can."

I heard him crank up and drive off. As soon as he left, I scuttled down cellar and called across to Emmy. She came running over, all fluttery, and I told her

to put on her wraps as fast as she could and go over to Jabez's house and find out from him what happened after he run up street with Sport in his arms.

"You surely don't think he——"

"I don't think nothing. For the love of Elisha and the major prophets, don't ask me no questions. Something serious has happened to the deacon, and we won't know what it is until the sheriff busts the sitting-room door down."

Emmy hurried off, and I went back and sat on the top cellar step. It was lonely waiting there. The old house creaked and groaned in the wind. I began thinking all sorts of things about Jabez, about his temper and his obstinacy and of the time he put on his first pair of long pants—cut down from a pair of Absolom's—and of how Mary cried when she thought he was going to sea.

The sound of the flivver, coming bumping along the Shore Road, was a welcome change. I heard the voices of the sheriff and the doc, as they came up the path. I went down cellar again and told Sheriff Wilkins everything I could about the night before, but naturally neglected to mention the part that Jabez played, or that he'd ever been there. The three of us went upstairs and, after calling the deacon some more, we braced ourselves for a mighty heave against the oak paneling of the door. At the third push, the bolts gave away and we all three floundered into the room.

There was the deacon, sitting, just as I had described, slumped down in his chair. But on the side away from the window, his face was covered with dried crimson, from a neat little hole in his right temple. Although we'd all seen dead men before, we were taken aback. The sheriff blew his nose, and I wiped the cold beads from my forehead. Doc Wilson was a doc all over. He went up to the corpse, made the usual perfunctory tests for life, then shook his head.

"Been dead about nine or ten hours. What would you say, sheriff? About a .44-caliber hole?"

"Yup, too big for a .32. Just about a .44, I should say, with a steel-jacket bullet. It didn't spatter none. Whoever done it liked clean work."

I felt his clear, blue eyes calmly searching over the room, then come to rest on me. I couldn't help shivering. I knew I looked more guilty than the actual murderer, as the sheriff came slowly over to me. I thought sure he'd produce handcuffs next.

"Go on home and make Emmy give you some breakfast. Tell her to put some blackberry cordial in your coffee. You look as if you'd seen a ghost." He pushed me from the room, with a good-natured slap on the shoulder, and I felt my heart pounding again.

BY the time I had changed and washed up, I heard Emmy bustling in the kitchen and smelled the pleasant fragrance of frying bacon and coffee. I called down to her and asked what Jabez had said, but she told me to hurry up before breakfast got cold. She didn't touch much herself, but between cups of coffee she told me that she had gone first to Jabez's house and found that he'd gone to the drug store. She followed him there and had to wait, while he mixed a prescription. At the first mention of the deacon, Jabez turned red with anger. He said he hadn't had a wink of sleep all night, but had stayed up with Sport, who whimpered from the pain of his broken ribs. She asked him if any one had seen him bathing Sport, and he answered that the postmistress had come in with Jed Saunders for some medicine, and that he'd told them both what the deacon had done.

"Those two will have it all over town before noon," I remarked.

"They have now," Emmy replied. "Everybody in the post office was talking about it and even had the effrontery to ask me if I'd seen the deacon kick Sport."

"Did anybody ask you about the deacon?"

"No; nobody."

"Emmy," I said, "prepare yourself for a shock. Last night between ten and half past, Deacon Caleb Brown was shot with a .44-caliber bullet in the right temple by a person or persons unknown. The law will have to take its course. I'm afraid, my dear, that some one we know and love

very dearly is in for a very bad time. We must both keep tighter mouths than ever and gossip with no one, because, unless I miss my guess, gossip, or what the law calls circumstantial evidence, will be invoked to hang a very dear friend of ours for first-degree murder."

"You mean they'll hang Jabez for shooting the deacon?"

Emmy began to cry softly into her apron. I got up from the table and put my arm across her shoulders.

"Buck up, old girl! They haven't hung him yet. They haven't even arrested him. But it's quite possible they will before the day's over, and they'll hold him in jail for indictment by the grand jury. If there's any way we can stave off this indictment and keep it a purely local affair, so much the better for everybody."

"But maybe the deacon committed suicide," cried Emmy, hopefully clinging to the last straw.

"No; he didn't. We both know the deacon too well for that. Besides, there was no revolver in the room. And we ourselves saw the deacon lock and bolt the door and windows."

"How funny he looked when that shade came tumbling down on top of him. Do you suppose he could have been hit by the shade roller and stunned?"

"If he was, he got over it quick, because we saw him sit down and go ahead with his writing. No; Emmy, I'm afraid that won't do."

"But how did Jabez come back into the room, kill the deacon, go out, then bolt the door on the inside?" Emmy's logical mind was working at last.

"That's just what I'm going to try to find out from Sheriff Wilkins," I answered, putting on my fur cap and going out the front door.

IN the deacon's yard a crowd of neighbors had gathered, all talking in low tones. Several tried to stop me, but I pushed past, entered the house through the cellar, and came up again into the hall, where I found Sheriff Wilkins and the coroner from Hyannis examining the walls and paneling, from top to bottom, for a bullet hole. After a while they

gave up and went back to the sitting room, where the body had been laid out, waiting for a conveyance to take it to the funeral parlors. There was some talk of holding an autopsy, but the coroner said that he didn't believe it would be necessary, since both Doc Wilson and he agreed that it was a .44-caliber bullet that entered the right temple.

While the two sawbones were making out the necessary death papers, I took the sheriff out into the hall and asked him if he had found any clews.

"Nary a clew. It's the dumbest case ever I see," he replied. "How in time any one could shoot the deacon and then lock and bolt the doors and windows on the inside, beats me. I thought that some one might have crawled up that furnace register in the corner, but the pipe is built slantwise, so that not even Houdini himself could have got through. There's only one cupboard in the room. One side is filled with plates and cups and saucers, and the other side is packed full of survey maps and charts of the county. In the two lower drawers are tablecloths and napkins. We pounded all over the walls and ceiling, and I'll take my oath there's not a secret door or closet in the whole place. All's as sound as a nut. A man can't shoot through a pane of glass without breaking it. And the windows were locked on the inside. But, what's funnier still, is that you and Emmy didn't hear the shot. You certainly must be sound sleepers. Want to be careful, or else you won't hear the Angel Gabriel's trumpet calling you to Judgment Day."

As I went out, I met Doc Wilson on the porch. The crowd was besieging him with questions, but he just smiled and shook his head. Seeing me, he pushed me ahead of him to his flivver and motioned me to get in.

"Let's get away from these yelping hyenas. They make me sick. Everybody pulling a long face and pretending to mourn for the deacon, when, down inside, they're as pleased as Punch that some one had the nerve to bump him off."

We drove on for a way in silence. Then he broke it with: "How well do you know Jabez Fowler?"

"Same as you—all my life. I'm mighty fond of him; he's almost like a son—that boy is."

"I thought so," he replied. "They've arrested him, you know, on suspicion—on a story cooked up by the postmistress and Jed Saunders, that they found him at eleven o'clock last night in my store, washing blood off his hands, which he said he got from bathing Sport, and vowing vengeance against the deacon for kicking the dog. Then this morning, when Constable Pratt made the arrest on a John Doe warrant, he found Absolom's old .44 in Jabez's hip pocket. Jabez said he'd brought it along to destroy Sport at lunch time, in case the vet pronounced his case hopeless. They've got Jabez in the lock-up now. If he's admitted to bail, at the hearing this afternoon, I thought you might like to know that there's a lumber packet sailing from Provincetown to Newfoundland on the morning tide."

"Turn tail and run? No, doc. The Fowlers aren't that breed. They're perfectly willing to take their medicine without whimpering," I told him. "Besides, we both know down deep that Jabez never killed the deacon. If he did, it was in a fair fight—none of this shooting from secret passages or trapdoors."

NOW, Mr. Feature Writer from New York, I'm not going to bore you with all the subsequent events of the past week. It's getting late, and I haven't any more pipe tobacco. Some time, when you want to write a novel about life on the Cape, I'll tell you all the ups and downs we went through. It would make several novels. What with backbiting, back-scratching, and hair-pulling, you could have a whole shoal of heroines, villains and villainesses. I've learned a whole lot about human nature, the friends you can trust, and the friends you can't—but have to, for the sake of appearances.

Every day things looked blacker and blacker for Jabez, who obstinately refused to talk or even to see a lawyer. Seemed like everybody turned against him, except Emmy and me. Emmy went over and stayed with Alice and never let

her know that Jabez was in jail, knowing how it would worry her, being confined and all. She told Alice that Jabez had to go to Boston for Doc Wilson on an urgent case, and every day I made Jabez write to her from jail. I dictated the letters, all about visiting the State House and Bunker Hill Monument, and how busy he was, and hoping each day to come home. Emmy was a mighty good watchdog and never let any one come inside the front gate.

I got permission from the sheriff to roam around the deacon's house. Me and Constable Pratt got real chummy during those roamings. He was just as anxious as me to clear Jabez's name, because in the old days he had served as bos'n on the *Nancy M.*, under Captain Absolom.

The sheriff had given strict orders that nothing was to be disturbed in the house until after the grand jury met; so everything remained just the same as it was on the night of the murder. In the late afternoon I took to sitting in the deacon's sitting room, just in the same position as the deacon was when he was shot. I knew I could have passed a perfect examination on every detail of the wall paper.

Then yesterday afternoon I shifted my position a little mite and began studying the china cabinet. The doors didn't look at all different, nor the handles, nor the casters. Across the top of the cabinet was a three-corner filagree design, cut with a jig saw, sort of holes and crosses. A big motor truck ran rumbling by the Shore Road, and all the plates rattled. I saw something move on top of the cabinet and catch the light of the sun which was pouring in the window from which the deacon had torn the shade. I called Pratt to bring a ladder and climbed up to investigate.

Here, before my eyes, was a slender copper tube, considerably less in diameter than the smallest the deacon used to protect his onionskin-paper map tracings. Climbing a step higher, I saw that this tube had been placed diagonally across the top of the cupboard, and that the forward end was directly in line with one of the holes of the jig-saw decoration.

BUT the tube was not the only interesting object on the china cupboard. In the far corner, half hidden in shadow, was a broken wine bottle, lying on its side. I nearly slipped from my perch, as I tried to reach it. Pratt steadied the ladder and asked what I had found. When I showed him the tube, he whistled in surprise. He was more excited still when I produced the wine bottle with its broken neck. Together we went over to the bay window and in the fading daylight examined our clews.

Except for its length and small diameter, the copper tube was just the same as the other small map containers. The lower end, however, was capped to prevent the maps from falling out. I asked Pratt why he thought the deacon had ever stuck it up slantwise on top of the cabinet, instead of putting it inside with the others. He took it from me and measured it alongside the cabinet doors.

"Too big to go inside," says he. "Deacon probably pushed it up on top to get it out of the way. But what in time was the deacon doing with a bottle of wine? That's what gets me. Everybody thought he was a strict teetotaler."

"Let's have another look at the bottle," says I, and, taking it to the window, I turned it upside down and saw the date "1847" blown into the bottom of the glass.

Pratt meanwhile had been examining the tube. He ran his little finger around the inside of the opening, remarking sarcastically that it was not much bigger than a revolver barrel. Pulling his finger out, he made me look at a green rim of verdigris above the first knuckle. Then he sniffed his finger.

"I'll take my oath that not very long ago this tube was filled with spirits. But it wasn't no 1847 vintage—that I'm sure. Here, smell!"

I sniffed his finger, too, and then the opening of the tube. While I'm no expert in fancy cordials, I know the raw smell of fresh wine. Had too much of it recently to be fooled.

"Maybe the deacon was running a speak-easy on the side and used this tube as part of a still," guessed Pratt.

"Too dangerous," I answered. "The

deacon was never one to take chances. I've got another hunch as to how the wine got into the tube. Fetch a lamp, and we'll have another look at the top of the cabinet."

When Pratt came back with the lamp, I was sitting on top of the stepladder. Holding the lamp above his head, he mounted the first two steps and peered over the jig-saw grille.

I showed him then where the liquid had spilled from the cracked neck of the bottle, and how it had formed quite a puddle in the center, where the boards were warped. Then I told him to hand me the copper tube and replaced it in exactly the same position as I had found it, with the forward end in line with one of the holes of the opening, and the rear end extending diagonally across the top of the cupboard, with the capped end of the tube just about flush with the rear end of the cabinet.

Pratt kept thundering questions at me, and finally I told him that if he didn't belay, I'd knock him into the scuppers. He shut up then and watched me, while I walked around to the back of the cabinet and measured with my eye the distance between the spot where the hot air from the furnace register entered the room along the side wall and the capped end of the copper tube, which was directly above.

"If the deacon had read more Scripture instead of worrying about his six per cent, he'd probably be alive to-day," I told Pratt. "Remember what the Bible says about putting new wine into old bottles?"

"It says you shouldn't."

"Right," I answered. "But the deacon never remembered it. The way I figure it, the deacon bought himself some new wine, but was too stingy to keep the new bottle; so he poured the wine into the old bottle, returned the new one, and got a few cents back. Then he hid the old bottle as far back as he could, where no one would find it.

"The old bottle couldn't stand the strain of the new wine fermenting, so it broke at its weakest place—the neck. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if the sudden zero-cold snap hadn't had a lot to do

with it. During the time the deacon was away at Hyannis, the house must have been colder than Godfrey's Tomb, and everything froze solid, including the wine.

"You can't make me believe that," says Pratt. "Everybody knows alcohol don't freeze."

"Pure alcohol don't," I agreed. "But remember that this was new wine and only a little mite fermented—hardly more than grape juice."

"But what's all this got to do with killing the deacon?" Pratt's brain could never take in more than one idea at a time. Then I told him, just as simple as I could, that, because it was so damned cold, the wine which had trickled down the copper tube froze up, like everything else. Says I to him:

"Jabez built a mighty big fire the night the deacon got back, to warm the whole house up. He told me he threw on just as much coal as he could, because the deacon was paying for it. Just about the time he should have turned the dampers down, he heard Sport yelping upstairs and ran up to find the deacon kicking his pup. Jabez picked up Sport and beat it for the drug store, forgetting dampers and everything else.

"The old furnace got piping hot and

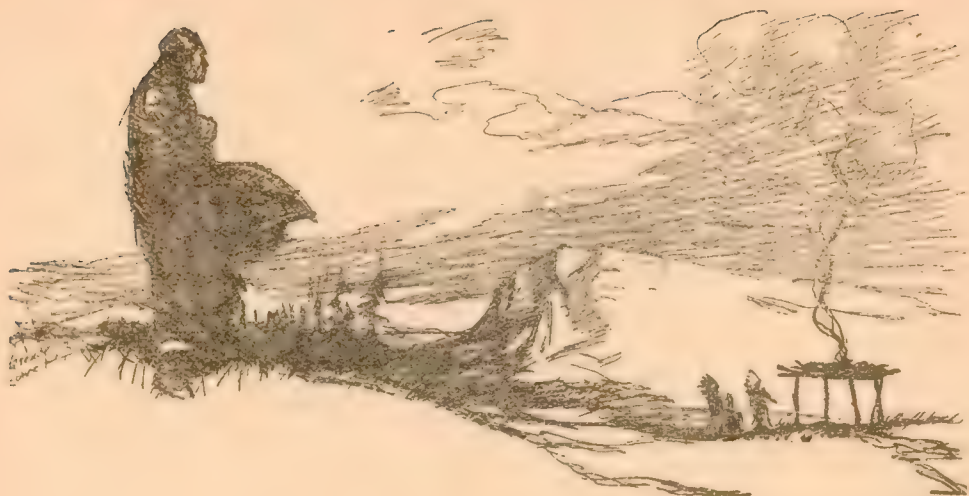
even sent up sparks. The hot air, coming from the register into the sitting room, went skyward and quickly melted the wine ice in the capped end of the copper tube. In the far end of the tube, the one pointing toward the deacon, there was an ice nugget jamming the opening. As a result of sudden expansion, due to great heat, this hard wine-ice nugget was blown out. It was this ice "bullet," just about the same size as .44-steel jacket, that drilled the neat hole in the deacon's right temple."

That, Mr. Feature Writer, is the physical explanation of Deacon Caleb Brown's murder. It was accepted by a quickly impaneled coroner's jury this afternoon, following a formal autopsy earlier in the day, during which no bullet was found in the deacon's skull. A new death certificate was signed and registered, in which the cause of death was attributed to "death by accident, cause unknown."

Who? Jabez? Emmy told me, just before you came in, that he had "just come home with Sport, from a most successful business trip to Boston." Doc Wilson came along, too, since the stork is expected before morning. Emmy says down at the post office they're betting two to one it will be a boy and red-headed.

ASTROLOGY ON A BUSINESS BASIS

IT was announced recently that there is a bill at Albany, soon to be introduced into the State legislature, to license astrologists. If by any freak of fortune this bill should be made into a law, it would put astrology on a business, if not a scientific, basis. Just as the desire to get rich quick proves an intractable human weakness, so the desire to know the future and to find some secret short cut to knowledge is an incurable malady of most mortals. It is doubtful whether white magic or black, astrology or fortune telling have added much to the wit, the wisdom, or the knowledge of the human race. A sage of Hoboken, New Jersey, who modestly styles himself the "nation's counselor," a short time ago sent to his prospective clients a comprehensive circular, which set forth an itemized list of various horoscopes, each with the price attached. "A good sketch of life, with prospects for one year," was to be had for five dollars; for twelve dollars you could have "a very good detailed sketch of life, with prospects for three years;" various other advantages were to be had at an ascending scale of prices; the ultimate in astrology was quoted at a hundred dollars, and for this sum you got "a most elaborate, special, complete, detailed daily advice, monthly calendar, form guide reading." From this precious calendar you could learn "the exact time of day that good or evil is indicated to occur." This professor's advanced slogan is: "A scientific horoscope is not a luxury but an absolute necessity."



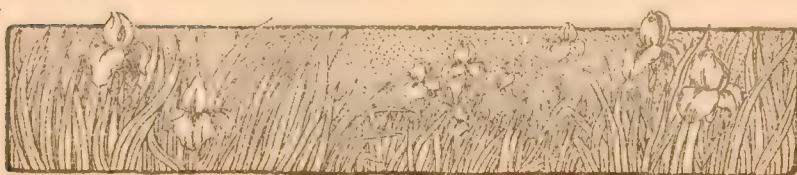
Dirge of An Indian Mother

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

THEY have carried him down to the hollow land,
To the hollow land below;
They have laid him down in the hollow land,
With his quiver and lance and bow;
Their feet are red with the bitter dust,
Their eyes are dim with woe.

They have kindled flame in the hollow land;
The withering branches groan;
They have slain his horse in the hollow land,
They have broken the bowl of stone.
His spirit rides on the drifting smoke,
In the hollow land and lone.

I shall go down to the hollow land,
When the East wind brings the dawn;
I shall go down to the hollow land,
Where my warrior son has gone,
When the panther drinks at the morning pool,
And the lean doe calls the fawn.





“Lonesome” Stakes a Claim

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of “The Game Warden Intervenes,” “The Kind that Gets There,” Etc.

It's a great country, was the refrain of “Lonesome,” who claimed to know of places where he could scoop up gold in his hands, pick di'monds from the trees—as much as he could carry. His happy-go-lucky fibs were too convincing, and before long he was in danger. Then he staked a real claim.

It's North you may run, to the rime-ringed
sun,

Or South to the blind Horn's hate,
Or East all the way, to Mississippi Bay,
Or West to the Golden Gate.

—*Song of the Argonauts.*

AS the first burro in the diggings was named Lightning, and the most uproarious camp, Heavenly Peace, so “Lonesome” was inevitably lonesome. He stood out as one who loved his fellow men, particularly as listeners. As long as one was present—and a tree toad might do in absence of a human—he would be nothing but garrulously happy and entertainingly inaccurate. For his was a barrage of talk, incessant, advancing, point after point, and demolishing, with sheer verbosity, any obstacles like protests or counter-talk.

But he was well liked, for all that. He was a lean and handsome youth of twenty years, straight shooting in a double sense, hard as a hickory rail, and with two years in the gold country behind him. That meant something—two years of survival, with clear eyes and head, unquenched spirit and high, good nature. For this was a rough, tough world, California, '51.

“And a great old country, gentlemen,” he declaimed. “Get back there far enough, back of the Feather River, where I just come from, grass won't grow for the gold in the ground. Poisons it, by Jiminy! Gold in pockets, gold in rocks, creek bottoms full of it! High water ain't muddy—it's yellow with gold. That's truth! Ants build their hills with it, solid, yellow dust. You don't have to stake no claim—just pick up what you can carry and lug it out. And then a little farther——

"Di'monds! I ain't seen this, but I know it for a fact, 'cause an Injun told me. Saved his life—that's why. Di'monds big as birds' eggs. Scattered all over like pebbles—whole valley of 'em. Glitterin' like to blind you. Di'monds in the crotches of trees, he said. When the young trees first brought through the ground, they just lifted 'em out. Next time I'm goin' back there."

His audience of newcomers clustered around him, filling one corner of the Shades Saloon. Mostly their mouths were agape. Some sneered, but surreptitiously. There was a certain vigor about him, a flash in his young, blue eyes, a suggestion of handiness in the way his gun swung at his holster, that discouraged open disbelief. Besides, it might all be true. It was such stories that had brought them, clerks, farmers, blacksmiths, city toughs, crooks, gamblers—what not—flocking to the new Eldorado. They wanted to believe him, and they nearly did.

But a sour-looking man at the edge of the group questioned quizzically:

"Why ain't ye back there now, then?"

Lonesome swept him with a look of disdain.

"Why? Had to come out, that's why. Had ten thousand in dust that I had to come out and cache. Got here just day 'fore yesterday. And I've done planted it. Lots more planted in that same place, too, where nobody'd find it till Day o' Judgment. And I've picked it all up on the fly—never staked a claim yet. Never will, either. Like to travel—that's me!"

His voice carried to the bar, lined with men, most of them miners back from the gold fields, celebrating their good luck, or consoling themselves for bad. Several of them turned and looked at him, frowning disapprovingly. It sounded dangerous to them—Lonesome's tale of his cache of gold. Probably it was harmless, youthful bragging, bolstering up his fantastic tales. But, then, it might be true, and there lay the danger. No one could know that it was not true. There were few limits to the possible in that new, fantastic world.

"The durn fool!" grumbled an old, red-whiskered miner. "Lord help him if

he can't tell where the stuff is hid, the day he's kidnaped for a-tellin' of that story. He'll die right gradual, he will—the durn fool!"

Having produced the maximum of sensation, Lonesome edged out of the group and strolled across the barroom to a monte game, where he stood looking on. With the cessation of his voice, two men, who had been talking quietly together at the end of the bar, turned and came toward him.

"Like to talk with ye a minute, Lonesome," said the foremost, touching his arm.

LONESOME turned, and his habitual smile left his face. He knew them, Magruger and Bunton, quite as well as he wanted to know them. They had a room near his at the Heart and Hand Hotel, and had scraped an acquaintance there. Tentatively, they had suggested that he go "pardner" in some vaguely hinted plan they had in mind to "make a haul for a lifetime." Perhaps they were more deceived in the youthful and apparently reckless Lonesome than he was in them. From the first, they reminded Lonesome of a tiger and a fox, nor had he changed his opinion.

Both were middle-aged and roughly dressed like miners, but there were no callouses on their hands. Magruger was a big, clean-shaven man, with a blunt, square face, as forceful looking as a cannon ball; his head was of a startling baldness and completed the resemblance. His eyes had a peculiar fierce brightness about them, and his mouth was big and voluble. Bunton was a little stocky man, oily and red in the face; his nose was hooked and pointed straight down at the end of his forward projecting jaw, with a thin, tight-lipped mouth between.

No, Lonesome did not like them; nevertheless, he accompanied them across the floor and, at their request, sat down at a secluded table.

"You been thinkin' about what we've been talkin' about?" queried Bunton.

"I ain't heard any talk—leastwise, nothin' substantial."

"Sure you ain't, not yet, because we don't know whether we can depend on

you. But if we c'u'd make a haul, a big one, a haul for a lifetime, and was to take you in as pardner——"

Lonesome laughed rather boastfully.

"A haul! I'm gettin' together a haul, plenty enough for me. Got most of it right now."

There was an instant's pause. A flash of questioning came into Bunton's eyes. Magruger's gaze, unobserved by Lonesome, grew gimletlike. They, like the others, doubted Lonesome's story, and yet—it might be true.

"O' course," said Bunton. "But we're talkin' about a real haul, hundreds of thousands. And—and something else."

His look grew meaner. The fumes of whisky drifted across the table at Lonesome. He realized that both men had been drinking enough to lessen their caution considerably. Also, there was a certain urgency about them, indicating the close approach to action in the direction of their mighty haul. Still Bunton hesitated, probing at Lonesome with cunning eyes, before he played what he intended to be his trump card of temptation.

"Gold ain't everything. There's—there's something else—scarcer than gold out here. Wimmen!" It was out. "We're goin' a long voyage—with a real haul—an' company. Look here!"

He drew a small leather case from his shirt pocket and passed it over to Lonesome. In it was a daguerreotype, a picture of a girl's face. A very young, irregularly beautiful, indubitably honest face, looked out at Lonesome and the world, with the effect of frank and happy curiosity. It was a curl-crowned, dimpled, very charming face, such as—Lonesome stared at it a moment, his thoughts drifting back, becoming boyish again—back to the opposite rim of the continent. Then his jaw tightened, and he put the picture back into Bunton's extended hand.

"She willin'?" he questioned.

Bunton grinned. "She's goin'."

Hardness came into Lonesome eyes and voice. "You ain't answered my question."

"And we ain't aimin' to tell you anything more till we find out where you

stand. We need another pardner, but we got one a-waitin', if you don't take on with us. He's a bit tough for us, but he'll do, I guess, if you won't come in."

Vaguely Lonesome thought of pretending agreement in order to discover what he could. Even if the girl were not what she seemed—impossible thought!—she should be saved from Bunton and Magruger. But it was a vagrant impulse, weakened by the thought that Bunton was probably lying, and inhibited by the code of the gold fields, that each man's business was his own. An unreasoning rush of rage seized Lonesome, as he watched Bunton restore the picture to the pocket of his greasy shirt.

"You can find out where I stand, right now. I ain't dealin' with skunks nor with you."

He was on his feet, hand on the butt of his gun. Magruger and Bunton had made swift, instant movements toward theirs—movements instantly checked. It was not that Lonesome would probably have beaten them to the shot, which kept them from drawing. It was rather, Lonesome thought later, a dread that, if he lived long enough, he would tell what he knew about them.

Lonesome stood for a moment looking at Magruger and Bunton, while men near by moved quietly and expertly out of range of the guns. But the hum of the wheels, the rattle of chips, and the monotonous voices of the gamblers, "Make your bets, gentlemen. The game is made," did not cease, nor would they have ceased at shots. At last, Lonesome turned from the sheepish looks of the two and strode with something of a swagger out of the saloon.

"That settles it," growled Magruger behind him. "Now we'll go ahead with 'Four-fingered Jack,' like I wanted to do all along."

"Yes, damn his hide!" declared Bunton and looked vengefully after Lonesome. "And he'll dance on air before mornin' and pay the piper for the tune, besides."

OUTSIDE, Lonesome strolled lightly down Kearney Street. The evening was just beginning, and there was no use letting Bunton and Magruger interfere

with his enjoyment of it. In a few minutes, he was singing, as he walked:

"Once more on Hangtown's hills we'll delve;
On Murderer's Bar we'll mine,
At Darky's Tent and Boston Jim's,
You Bet, Reg Dog, Port Wine,
On Poker Flat and Poor Man's Shack,
Once more our luck we'll try.
There nuggets can be found as thick
As stars up in the sky.

"Oh, it's a great country, gentlemen
——" Lonesome was soon declaring again.

The streets were bright with decoy lamps and radiance from canvas walls, gay with flags and streamers, and tumultuous with sound. Every saloon had its brass band, hurdy-gurdy or fiddlers, valiantly competing. Men's voices hummed, sang, shouted, rose excitedly, and roared out greetings. It was a nearly masculine world. Predominant were the American miners, swaggering, bearded sons of Titans, riotous with strength and sudden wealth, or the hope of wealth. Here and there were Spanish-American dandies, colorful in their wide sombreros, their white shirt fronts, and scarlet sashes; or, perhaps, a swarthy Moor, or a straight-featured Abyssinian, or a pig-tailed, blue-garbed Chinaman. Then there were professional loafers in plenty and of all races—men who mined in human weakness, sinister strays from more than the Seven Seas. And last, a new and growing element, whom the loafers eyed askance, keen-eyed, even-voiced men in creased suits, whose talk was of rents, dollar-per-front-foot real estate, cargoes, costs of building, and prices of merchandise—and particularly the costs of fires and thievery.

Low-toned and grave was that talk about fires—a very dangerous undertone. Five times had San Francisco been burned by thieves who looted amid the confusion. Five times had the citizens rebuilt, bigger and better each time, with the lots going up in value, while the ruins lay smoldering on them.

Last week another fire had been started, fortunately soon controlled. But another kindling had taken place—that of the city's anger. A noosed rope dangled

from a pole projecting from the second story of the headquarters of the Committee of Vigilance. And a five-thousand-dollar reward was offered by that same committee to whoever caught the proper gallow's fruit, the next incendiary.

And along other lines, the forces of law and of lawlessness were coming to grips in San Francisco—the scum of Sydney Town and Little Chile against the merchant, mining, and working classes. Not long ago "The Hounds," an aggregation of crooks who openly sought control of the city, had been forcibly disbanded. But they were forming again more secretly; befriended by the professional gamblers and keepers of dives and lodging houses. Already there had been clashes between the two elements. So, beneath the turbulence, there was tension in the air that evening. Men walked warily, hands near holsters, or they stood in groups, shouldered together, talking in undertones.

Lonesome noticed all this, but carelessly. He had seen the same line-up in back-country mining camps. It didn't concern him at all. What did concern him was that the world was good, that he was on his fling from the mines, and must have it before returning.

He knew practically nobody in San Francisco; but, before long, it seemed that he knew everybody. In and out of doors he went, drinking a little, gambling a little, dancing a little, talking much and always astonishing the newcomers with his tales of the back country. He made the pale-faced, emotionless gamblers frown because of his careless flippancies, and he invited professional hangers-on to drink, and then inviting them to pay. Oh, life was fine! Life was good!

A bell was ringing somewhere. But what was a bell? Queer, how the people scurried. "Fire!" said some one. Another: "The Vigilantes!" A second bell began to ring—or, rather, to toll. Louder and deeper, this was, than the other.

"That's for the Vigilantes," said some one alongside Lonesome at the bar. "The other was the alarm for fire."

"Lord!" cried Lonesome. "I got some things in a fire trap—the Heart and Hand." And he laughed.

HE was out on the street in a minute. Some one, running past him, said the fire was on Vallejo Street, west of Powell. The wind was blowing from the west. It was another plot to burn the city. The Heart and Hand Hotel was on Vallejo and Stockton, directly in the way of the fire.

Lonesome ran with the rest, but with no worry. If he lost what he had, it would not be much. When he turned into Vallejo, just on the edge of Little Chile, he saw a glare lighting up the fog ahead of him. He had not noticed till then that a thick fog had drifted in from the Pacific. The glare was well on the other side of Powell Street, so his hotel was safe enough as yet.

But it was odd—a crowd was in front of it, filling the entire street. This crowd was increasing in size every minute, and, as Lonesome drew nearer, he could hear a flare of high-pitched angry voices, above a roaring undertone, which sounded still more dangerous. Lonesome sobered. He had heard such sounds before, and on every one of those occasions that undertone had made for mischief.

"Lord! They got the man," he muttered, with a queer, unpleasant thrill of excitement.

Then, as he came closer: "No, they ain't got him, but they think they're goin' to."

He was on the edge of the crowd, which was boiling angrily about in the street. Light from a score of open windows of the hotel, two saloons, and a dance hall, illuminated the scene.

"They say they know who set the fire," an excited voice volunteered at his elbow. "They found kerosene and oil-soaked rags in his room. And two miners are ready to swear that they saw him set the blaze and then skip away before they could grab him."

"Fellow called 'Lonesome,'" another voice chimed in. "Landlord says he don't know nothin' else about him."

"Lonesome! Hell! Why, that's—that's——"

Then Lonesome could have bitten his tongue in two, as he did his sentence, for it came to him in a swirl of thought, first, that he did not know by name a single

soul he had met in the last two hours, and so would find it hard to prove his innocence; second, that the landlord knew him by name too well to be making a mistake that way; third, that if this crowd caught him, they might not wait for the Vigilantes to give him a trial. But it was too late. His words had been overheard.

"What's that? What you say?" His neighbor eyed him suspiciously.

"Lonesome! Sye, Hi know that beggar," a voice piped from Lonesome's left. It belonged to a little cockney, who was also stopping at the Heart and Hand. He looked around, and his eyes widened, as they rested on Lonesome.

"Why, you—you're—— There the blighter stands, boys!" he yelled.

But he was standing there no longer. Life to Lonesome was precious, though motiveless. Hitherto he had borne it somewhat like a lighted candle, at the mercy of any whimsical wind. Lonesome laughed, thinking of Bunton and Magruger and the five-thousand reward and their revenge. Before any one could seize him, he whirled and sprinted down Vallejo Street. It was lucky he had not got farther into the crowd before he was recognized.

"Hi! Hey! Stop, you——" came the yells behind him, followed by a spattering of pistol shots.

Lonesome had taken the one way that was open to him, yet the direction of his flight completed the conviction of the crowd as to his guilt. He was plunging straight into Sydney Town, chief breeding place of crime and natural refuge for such as he was supposed to be.

But, since escape was the principal thing, it was well that he fled that way. Practically all orderly residents of San Francisco belonged either to the Vigilantes or the volunteer fire departments, and the signal bells had called them all to the fire-threatened section. The drifting miners and other transients had, of course, followed them. Consequently, there remained in Sydney Town few save its regular inhabitants, whose sympathies would be with the fugitive, and others too drunk to leave.

It was a sinister, dangerous place.

Kerosene lamps irradiated canvas walls and threw dim light through the windows and between unmatched timbers of shabby saloons, lodging houses, dance halls, and gaming rooms.

Within, lurked "Sydney coves," crafty Chileans and Peruvians, flotsam and jetsam from all the tides of the world, crooks and murderers from every port. Drunken, maudlin laughter floated out upon the damp, foggy air of the night. From the seductively named "Live and Let Live," came quarreling, high-pitched voices, the sound of blows, a shot, then a sudden, suggestive silence.

But the street was almost deserted. Now and then skulking forms showed up ahead, but withdrew precipitately into alley or building before the sound of the running men. Underfoot were gullies and slippery mud, and the way was cluttered with piles of packing boxes and barrels and kegs and then more barrels. Lonesome dodged between them and around them, managing to keep some of them always between him and the pursuit, so that the shooting gradually stopped.

"Them sons-of-guns!" Lonesome muttered, angrier each moment at his enemies. "Them lyin', murderin', perjurin' —" Epithets failed him. "What I'll do to them will be a scorcher. Only — only —"

His thought of revenge stumbled impotently over the fact that, even if he escaped to-night, he would be a fugitive from San Francisco, and lucky if he could remain so. While they stayed on, "honest miners." Bah!

"Well, anyway, I ain't staked no claim here," thought Lonesome. "I can go."

THE pursuit had spilled over into Broadway and Green Street, paralleling Vallejo on the north and south, so he couldn't double back. Ahead of him were wooden wharves, thrusting like stubby fingers out into the bay.

"Hell! I can swim," he thought.

Suddenly, remembering something of the contour of this part of the water front, he slipped sidewise into one of the meanest of the mean streets of Sydney Town. Baxter Alley, it was called, bordered

by two lines of dismal drinking places, with a tangle of flimsy dwellings at their backs. It was in such a place that he might be expected to hide; and hide he did, for a minute, in the tangle of dwellings beyond the alley. Then he slipped cat-footed on; and when the crowd, coming up, began breaking in doors and dragging out occupants of the buildings, Lonesome was already letting himself out down into the little inlet of the bay, at the end of Baxter Alley.

He swam straight out, with a little parting flirt of the hand. Easy, this was! The fog enveloped him like a soft, black fleece. No fear now. He would be invisible from a searching boat a yard away. And he could swim all night, the salt water buoyed him up so perfectly. He made for the opposite shore, with long, clean, easy strokes. Surely he could make it.

But where *was* the opposite shore, and where was San Francisco? The fog enveloped both; he was lost in that moist and murky world. Not a single light was to be seen, nor a reflection on the sky. The wind had almost died down; there was no telling, anyway, how it was blowing out here, with the hills all around the bay, all jagged with gaps, and the Golden Gate beyond. This was surely the right direction. But, was it? Lost men walk in circles; do they swim in circles, too?

He swam a long time—a long, long time. Now and then he turned on his back and rested; but it was never much of a rest. His body grew steadily less buoyant. Waves broke over his face, strangling him. He thought of discarding his boots and revolver, but refrained. They were necessities, wherever he might land. He grew so tired that it was a torture to keep on trying, but he kept on.

He was rewarded, after a timeless period, by seeing two lights, like monstrous eyes, staring at him in the darkness. Hallucination born of terrible fatigue tried to whisper to him many grotesque frightening things about those lights, but reason told him they were the lights of a ship. And when they turned into dull balls of fire, pointing ghostly fingers toward him through the fog, he knew he was making way toward them.

An eternity or so later, he found himself clinging to the stern-anchor chains of a small vessel. It was all he could do to hold on.

The low waves broke with a sibilant rippling along the vessel's sides. The anchor chains grated slightly against her gunwales, as the long, low swells passed under her. Somewhere a rope chafed against a mast. There were no other sounds, though Lonesome listened and listened.

He saw that she was a half-clipper vessel of light tonnage, such as had been diverted by the hundreds from the Eastern coastwise traffic. It was possible that all on board were asleep, but more probable that they had deserted for the mines—captain, crew and all. But the lights fore and aft seemed to contradict that, unless she had been deserted so recently that they hadn't had time to burn out.

"By Jiminy, if I could get away with one of her boats!" muttered Lonesome. "Well, here goes for a try."

STRENGTH had returned to him rapidly. Without great difficulty he climbed up the slanting anchor chain to the deck. But there followed disappointment. Both of the ship's boats were gone. It certainly appeared that she was deserted. If so, he was safe for a while; but he knew that in the morning the Vigilantes would search every ship in the harbor for him.

"I sure got to keep driftin' along. A raft would do. If only I was sure there's nobody on board to bother while I make one."

Returning aft, he crept through the hatchway and down the ladder to the lower deck. In darkness, like the inside of a pocket, he stole along the narrow companionway. Unexpectedly he came up against two boxes, one on top of the other, and the uppermost fell with a crash. Had they been placed there purposely as a warning device, he wondered. For a long minute he listened without stirring, but nothing happened. Coming to the door of what he thought likely was the captain's cabin, he pressed his ear against it.

Still nothing. No sound, that is, and

yet it seemed to Lonesome that something stirred, setting up vibrations so delicate that his eardrums could not receive them. Perhaps he could not separate them from the faint sounds of the wind and the water and the indefinable murmur of the ship. There was something, but nothing fearful. Or, was there anything at all? Suddenly, growing impatient with his thoughts, Lonesome flung the door inward.

Then his mouth opened agape. "Great Lord A'mighty!" it framed the words.

For, by the light of a flickering tallow candle in a bracket, Lonesome saw the girl of Bunton's picture, shrinking back from him against the outer wall of the cabin, raising a revolver in a very uncertain and wavering hand. And, though he knew she was going to shoot from very panic, fear and astonishment held him in his tracks.

And the next instant the cabin was filled with the crack and roar of the girl's gun, held in so nerveless a hand that, at the report, it clattered to the deck.

Lonesome, hit, staggered half around and leaned against the door.

"Now you've done it," he said.

Then he laughed and involuntarily grimaced with pain at the same instant—a gargoylelike distortion of his features.

"Well, it took a girl to get me, anyway," he commented.

The girl stared at him. Something in his voice, his laugh, his eyes, the boyish lines of his face, chased the fear from her eyes, but it was replaced by horror at what she had done.

"Oh, I hope—— I didn't mean to—— I——"

"Just plumb carelessness, eh? I'm glad you didn't go for to shoot me. I guess I'd better sit down."

And, still gazing at her, as though he could not believe his eyes, he sank down upon a sea chest which stood near the door.

"It ain't your shot so much, miss, as——"

For the first time in his life he fumbled for words. He meant to say that it was astonishment at the sight of her that weakened him; and it was not so far-fetched an idea. The women whom

Lonesome had known for two years had been either Amazonian creatures, strong, rough, semimascuine, or the unattractive women of the dance halls. Strong and supple enough she appeared, slender and erect; but daintily and femininely beautiful, from the top of her curl-crowned head to the worn soles of her shoes. She was like—why, she was like a flower! She was like sun-kissed arbors and Sunday-school picnics and other things he had known away back there in another life, which he had never missed till now. She was like a look into heaven. Fatuously Lonesome smiled and then thought of Magruger and Bunton and their talk of her.

THE change on his face frightened her and drew her closer to him. She went over to the sea chest and stood by his side, evidently now much agitated.

"Are you—— Where are you hit?"

"I suppose we'd ought to be thinkin' about that."

With a painful effort, Lonesome raised his left arm and felt of the crimson-soaked shirt beneath it.

"It ain't much, I'm thinkin', miss. But we'd ought to stop this bleedin'."

"Oh! Wait a minute."

Suddenly, with a firm compression of the lips, the girl became surprisingly efficient. She hurried over to a cabinet near the head of the single berth and came back with bandages, some liniment, and a bottle of brandy. Lonesome had his shirt partly off, and she helped him the rest of the way.

The bullet had luckily glanced off his ribs, but had passed through the muscles in front of and under the pit of his left arm. Not until the girl had swabbed off the wound and wrapped Lonesome's chest with bandages, did she speak. Then she looked at his water-soaked clothes and frowned doubtfully.

"Where did you come from?" she asked abruptly.

That *was* a question. How much should he tell her?

"From the water, miss," he replied evasively, grinning.

"I can see that," she replied severely. "I mean—— Well, anyway, you need

dry clothes. Wait a minute." She left the cabin.

When she came back, she had a complete outfit of shore-going clothes of a rather good cut and fabric, which she placed on the floor before Lonesome.

"I'll be waiting outside," she said very formally. "When you've changed, rap on the door, and I'll come in."

The wound troubled Lonesome considerably, while he changed, but it troubled him equally that the clothes were several sizes too large. A fine figure he would make in them! Not that it mattered, of course. The things that mattered were: Who was the girl, and what was she doing here, and what of Bunton and Magruger? And what was he, Lonesome, going to do?

When he rapped, she entered instantly and came immediately to the point she had attempted before.

"Now, maybe you'll tell me who you are, and where you are from, and what you're doing here?"

Lonesome began with the easiest question.

"Why, I'm just Lonesome, miss. I am——"

"Lonesome!" Her voice seemed to break queerly on the last syllable.

"Yes—just Lonesome. That's what they call me. My real name is Peter Wright, but they don't go so much on real names out here. All 'Yankee Joes' and 'Scar-faced Charleys' and 'Missouri Jacks' and so on. And I'm Lonesome."

"Oh! You're Lonesome."

The girl began to laugh oddly, with little choking attempts at self-control. Then she put her hands to her face, and at some particular point her laughter changed to sobs, but this Lonesome didn't know. He stared at her bewilderedly, almost resentfully. There was nothing about his name to go into hysterics about.

"Well, I don't mind. And if I don't see——"

"Oh, I'm sorry! I'm ashamed!" She removed her hands, and he saw her struggling with tears. "But when you said that; if you knew how lonesome I've been the last four days—lonesome and afraid! For myself and for father, too. I——"

"Your father! Then you've—— Where is he?"

"Ashore." Suddenly she was on guard again. "He'll be back any minute now."

Lonesome looked at her, smiling pleasantly.

"Now, miss, I ain't dangerous. My gun won't shoot, and this arm won't work, and you could push me over with a feather, if you shoved it against this shoulder. And, if I was as strong as twenty lions, I'd be just as harmless. Can't you just go on with what you started to tell me?"

She bit her lips, which tried to smile just a little in answer to his. But she kept her eyes on him. Certainly he did not look bad. Why, he was merely a boy, little older than herself. And there was something nice in his eyes. Before she knew it, she found herself talking to him.

"Yes, I'll tell you, though you haven't answered my questions yet. Father *may* be back any minute, but he's been gone four days. He's captain. The crew deserted as soon as we made harbor. He went ashore to try to get another crew, and—he's never come back."

"Oh, I see."

"He didn't want me to come," she went on, sensing disapproval in Lonesome's tone. "I didn't know till after he'd shipped the cargo that he was coming. Then, I made him take me. We're alone, daddy and I. Mother's gone. I didn't want to be left behind. And, besides, father——" She checked herself abruptly.

"Oh, I'm afraid he's been killed," she went on. "He *wouldn't* leave me here so long. He must've been killed, or else——" Again that odd pause. Clearly she was hiding some other fear concerning her father. "I got so afraid. And that was why I——"

She glanced in shame at Lonesome's wounded shoulder.

"Oh, I ain't blamin' you for pinkin' me," said Lonesome. "You done exactly right. I'm a desperate character, I am. If you'd seen me a couple of hours ago, with all of San Francisco after me, you'd have drilled me proper, perhaps. Now I'll tell you my story."

AND he did, making a serio-comedy of it, and the girl smiled half of the time. That was pure selfishness on Lonesome's part, for when she smiled there came to Lonesome an indescribable tightening at the heart and a lifting of the spirits, very pleasant and wholly unique. Of course, he said nothing about Bunton having her picture, and the plans of Bunton and Magruger concerning her. There was no use to make her worry. But it all linked up, now. Bunton and Magruger had got the picture from her father, and they were probably responsible, directly or indirectly, for her father's disappearance.

So well were they acquainted by now, that Lonesome had no thought of her disbelieving his story, nor did she think of disbelieving. Toward the end, he could no longer make her smile.

"Oh! And they're still looking for you—the Vigilantes! You must get away. You say you were going to build a raft. I'll help you. I'll show you where the carpenter's chest is, and——"

"But I've changed my mind. I ain't figurin' on goin' now, miss——"

"My name's Rosa Steele. But why aren't you going?"

She knew already why he was not going, he thought. No use trying to lie to her, though he would not frighten her about Bunton and Magruger as yet.

"Well, it's like this. You've been right in bein' afraid. You ain't safe here, not for a minute."

"But how about yourself? You've already told me that the Vigilantes will search the ships in the morning."

He had told her that. That had been a mistake.

"Maybe they won't. And, if they do, they won't be all excited, like everybody was to-night. I guess I can reason with them."

"You don't believe that. They'll *hang you!* I'm not afraid. I'm in no worse danger than I've been all along."

Lonesome shuddered, thinking of Bunton's words. "Goin' on a long voyage—with company." He doubted if he could make her understand, even if he tried, the full danger she was in, though probably nothing would happen to-night.

Bunton and Magruger had not yet made their haul. But he could not leave her. He would stay and see that the Vigilantes took her off, when they took *him* off, in the morning.

"Oh, pshaw, miss! They won't hang me. Besides, I couldn't get very far on a raft, anyway, not with this game arm, and after the time it'd take us to build it. I just got to stay."

His tone was bantering, but there was firmness under it, and Rosa gave up the argument.

"After I've shot you," she said ruefully.

"It is too bad about that, because I won't be much use, especially with my cartridges all water soaked."

"Let's see." Rosa picked up his gun, which lay on the foot of the berth. "No, my cartridges wouldn't fit. But I've got——" She clipped off the sentence, eying him. "That doesn't matter. What I was going to say is, you take my gun. You see, I—I shoot the wrong people." She smiled at him.

"Oh, I—— Do you think I ought to?" Lonesome was quite overcome by her smile and her trust in him—though he did sense a reservation there—and by relief at being able to get his hand on a serviceable revolver again.

"Of course." She slipped a fresh cartridge into the empty chamber, took a cartridge belt from a peg on the wall, slipped the revolver upon it, and handed it to him. With some difficulty, using only one hand, he fastened it around his waist.

"That's fine and dandy." He couldn't repress his elation. "First time in two years my old shooting iron's been out of commission."

"You've been out here two years?"

"Yep. And, say, Miss Steele, it's a great old country." Once launched, his talk drove on under its own power. "Gold! Pockets full of it, creek bottoms yellow with it. I washed two thousand dollars outa one pan of dirt, once. Bought a chicken to celebrate with, and took forty dollars outa that fowl's crop. Saw one chunk of solid gold, weighed near two hundred pounds. I came in day 'fore yesterday, with fifteen thousand dollars in dust. I got it cached where

it'll be good and safe, and there was plenty there already. Just picked it all up. Never staked a claim yet. Just drifted around and picked it up.

"And di'monds! I ain't tellin' everybody this, but back of where I was this last trip, back Nevada way——"

Lonesome's voice trailed off; his body grew tense; his hand moved toward his revolver butt, but halted midway.

Other eyes than Rosa's had widened at his story, but not with that look of stark, staring terror that had come to hers. And they had shifted from Lonesome's face to a point directly over Lonesome's shoulder, where the unguarded door stood open.

Fool, Lonesome called himself—triple-distilled, thrice-cursed fool! To sit with his back to that doorway! For his movement to turn and to draw was checked by a significant pressure against his spine, and a metallic voice said:

"Put 'em up."

Dead men are useless, really. Slowly Lonesome lifted his hands—easy, with that left arm of his! Surely that was Bunton's voice. He sought and caught Rosa's eye and tried to flash her a reassuring message. He winked. Then, while she looked at him, his mobile face changed. In a moment a laughing devil lurked in his eyes; his fluent, but strong, mouth became a loose-lipped, devil-may-care one. This, while another familiar voice spoke behind him:

"Well, if it ain't Lonesome himself. Damned if we ain't in luck to-night!"

The speaker had reached from behind and was drawing Rosa's gun from its holster.

Lonesome slowly turned, meeting no objection, to face Magruger and Bunton. Magruger was leering at the girl; but Bunton had his eyes on Lonesome.

"Gee, I'm in luck, too!" said Lonesome. "I was hopin' you'd turn up."

"You was, eh?" asked Bunton coldly. "That's nice."

"You're sure travelin' slow," grinned Magruger, "considerin' how much you're wanted ashore."

"The floosie shot me," explained Lonesome, jerking his head backward toward Rose. "So I couldn't get away. Then

we made up—no use quarrelin'. But I'm sure ready to take that trip you was talkin' about to-night."

"You are, eh? How come you change your mind?" questioned Bunton.

"Oh, hell! You're thinkin' of what I said to-night at the saloon," declared Lonesome. "Ain't you never had to make a bluff, yourself? I couldn't tell you, but there, at the very next table, a-listenin', was the *alcalde* from Hangtown. You know how they are up there, and they was lookin' for me just a little while ago. Seems they thought I was more of a collector than a miner, and that I was doin' more of my prospectin' on the trails than in the mines." Lonesome laughed suggestively. "In present company, I don't mind admittin' that I've found the gun a sight more profitable than the pan. But I had to make myself pure and white before that there *alcalde*."

"You're lyin'."

"The devil I am! I'll show you, before we're many days older. I'll show you to-night, if—— How many miners has got fifty thousand in dust and nuggets cached away?"

"Not many, I guess." Bunton was still looking at Lonesome doubtfully, but the light of cupidity was growing in his eyes. He hesitated a moment and then suddenly came to a grinning resolution.

"Hey, Jack," he called over his shoulder to some one outside the door. "It's all right; nobody else on board. Come in."

"You see," he went on to Lonesome, "three men is little enough to run this craft, so when you turned us down we took on that other pard we was speakin' of. He's a little rough for us, as Magruger, here, said; but now I can see where his roughness may be useful."

"Introducin' Four-fingered Jack," said Magruger, with mock ceremony.

THE third man entered the cabin. Lonesome, though his face kept its mask of smiling deviltry, felt a troop of chills course up and down his spine. There was something inhuman and terrifying about the newcomer. He was a Mexican, with more than a touch of

Aztec, burly and powerful of body, with nearly black skin, gross, brutal features, and glittering, black eyes that darted from Rosa to Bunton and back again.

"Now, about that gold of yours," said Bunton. "I heard you tellin' the girl about it. I've been hearin' so much about it that I've got to thinkin' it's a lie. An' we don't need it, anyway, 'cause we made a haul for a lifetime to-night. But fifty thousand ain't anything to sneeze at. An' if you're what you say you are, why, we're pards."

"You can come along an' help us work the boat, anyway. With that game arm an' without a gun, you can't bother us at all. And if it's a lie about the gold, just say so now, and we'll forget it, because—what's a lie? But if you lie from now on, you'll wish you hadn't. Take a good look at Four-fingered Jack here?"

"Been lookin' right along," said Lonesome.

"Trigger fingers cut off by his countrymen 'cause of too great mortality in his neighborhood, but he's learned to shoot with the others. But that ain't what he's most useful for. He's an eddicated man, he is, along the lines of makin' people welcome death an' pray for it. He can do things that I couldn't do, nor maybe watch; but, so help me the devil, I'll turn you over to him and let him enjoy himself if it turns out you are lying to us now. Say, is that gold real or a fairy story?"

"Real as ever was," said Lonesome.

"Well, can we get it without any danger, an' how long'll it take? 'Cause we got to be outa the Gate by daylight. Though, with this land breeze, that won't take long."

"It won't take more'n an hour to get it—less, likely. An' it's safe enough. You see, I rented one of them cabins out in the sand dunes, about half a mile off the Presidio Trail, took up a section of the floor, and buried the gold in the sand underneath. Then I just kept away from it entirely, except, of course, when I went there to bury more gold. That was always along toward mornin', so nobody ever saw me."

"An' you thought that was a smart trick," asked Magruger, "with the cus-

tomhouse there to take care o' the gold for you? Of course, if you collected it like you say, you wouldn't want to put it in there. An', anyway, when you consider what happened to the customhouse to-night——"

"Never mind that now," said Bunton. "We got to hurry. First, we'll have to shift them boxes from our boat into this craft. When you heft 'em," he said to Lonesome, "you'll know we made our haul, all right. Then we'll go along, the five of us, an' get that gold o' yours. Come on now, you!"—to Rosa.

Lonesome turned to Rosa and let her pass before him out of the cabin. Extremity of danger seemed to have produced in her extremity of courage; her face was colorless, but proud and still. And there was a suggestion of power about her, too, of confidence, of some secret resolve, connoting a hidden strength. Puzzling that was, to Lonesome.

Lonesome grinned, as she passed him by, tried to look mockingly at her, and barely audibly he hummed, as they passed in single file down the companionway:

"Down in the walls of prison,
Down in the walls of jail;
Down in the walls of prison,
With no one to go my bail."

A very little later, the rowboat in which they left the ship had rounded North Point, and at Lonesome's direction was edging toward the beach, with Magruger and the Mexican working hard at the oars. Rosa sat silent in the stern seat, but Lonesome, in the prow, hummed other little snatches of reckless jailbird songs and talked incessantly with Bunton. Overleaping Bunton's own imagination, he laid plans for the future; of this man and that, cutthroats all, to be picked up farther south; of guns to be purchased; a certain cannon that could be procured; of golden cargoes to be taken, and an empire across the Mexican line, which lay waiting to be seized. The spirits of all dead and living pirates and filibusters lived in him while he talked, but Bunton listened with his own secret thoughts.

"Luck, just luck," said Lonesome at

length, "that things have turned out so well. I meant to look you up to-morrow and join in with you, but you'd have been gone."

"You was darn forcible about refusin'," returned Bunton, not overamiably. "It pretty near cost you your neck. We was goin' to put that kerosene and stuff into another fellow's room, but you was so high minded we changed our plan. I don't mind tellin' you that we hoped you'd be caught an' hung."

"Considerin' it'd be worth five thousand to you, of course you would," chuckled Lonesome.

"Oh, hell! We never aimed to collect that five thousand, except, maybe, if our other plan didn't go through. What we wanted was the excitement of the fire an' the hangin' and so on. While that crowd was huntin' you, an' the rest of the town was fightin' the fire, do you think we was settin' on our thumbs? That was when we was snakin' out them boxes that we shifted from this boat."

"You must've emptied the customhouse," said Lonesome with much admiration.

"Pretty near did," Bunton went on, his vanity touched. "I might as well tell you, because, after this, you'll either be pardners with us or just the hole in a cipher. We've had a warehouse right next the customhouse rented for a month. We've been makin' a tunnel ever since, down and up again and through the brick floor of the customhouse. And to-night we tapped the last tap and brought the good stuff out. Had a wagon waitin' and ran it down to the water front."

"And that was why you done in the girl's father, so you'd have his ship to get away in."

"Yes; only it wasn't necessary to do him in. We just helped him hunt for sailors in the beginnin' an' for different brands of liquor after that. First drink in two years, he said, when he took one outa Magruger's bottle; but, say, when he gets started he's a goer and a stayer. We kept him supplied with booze, with the money we took off him in the start. Last night, though, we slipped something extra into his drink. He's stowed

away in a sailors' haven right now, and he won't wake up till to-morrow."

"Wouldn't it have been safer to kill him?" suggested Lonesome.

"Maybe," replied Bunton. A slow smile came over his face, hidden from Lonesome in the darkness. "Maybe," said Bunton deliberately, "it would be safer to kill you."

Lonesome got the impression that he had somewhat overshot the mark in pretending villainy. However, the trip was very near an end. Lonesome had kept close watch of the vague outlines of the sand ridges to the south. Now he muttered a word to the oarsmen, and they swung the boat inshore and ran her prow upon the beach.

Lonesome, followed closely by Bunton, crawled out of the boat. Magruger and Four-fingered Jack came after them, dragging the lightened boat well up on the shelving beach. Magruger extended a hand to help Rosa out, but she ignored it and leaped lightly to the sand.

"All right! You show us the way," muttered Bunton to Lonesome. "And remember what'll happen to you if you don't lead us straight to the stuff."

Lonesome was remembering, all right, with some quavering of the flesh. He'd be delivered to Four-fingered Jack, and never was an Aztec Mexican without shrewd knowledge of ways of torture and delight therein. And Bunton's tone told Lonesome that his efforts at cajoling had been a failure—that Bunton was as far from confidence in him as he had ever been.

WHAT was to be done, then, must be done, not by stratagem, but by swift and decisive action; and here he was with one crippled arm and without weapons of any kind.

Now he must lead off, however, and so he started on. The fog had thinned a little. He could see the sand dunes, dotted by chaparral and sagebrush, for perhaps twenty feet ahead. Beyond that was the curtain of night and fog, and beyond that— Well, if he were lucky, the blacker curtain of death. For there was certainly no conceivable way in which *he* could escape.

They encountered no one. A lonely cabin loomed up in the fog; then another and another. These they skirted widely and silently, though they were probably deserted. It was only when the rains checked the mining in the back country that the miners returned to them. Indeed, the whole section was a waste, from Taylor Street to the Presidio.

They crossed the Presidio Trail. The sand was deeper and looser here. It impeded their steps and sucked at their feet. How far was it to the nearest peopled street of San Francisco? Lonesome wondered. A mile, perhaps? It was hard to estimate distance in these trackless dunes. Hard, indeed, to reckon direction, with this fog enshrouding all. More and more helpless appeared the fragment of a plan that Lonesome had conceived.

A dark bulk appeared ahead of them and took shape as a one-room log cabin. Lonesome stopped before the door.

"Here it is," said he.

"Fine!" said Bunton tonelessly, coming up on Lonesome's right.

"You'll find it fine," Lonesome replied lightly. "Twenty-four-carat fine—pure gold and no dirt."

"Pure action's what we want now," said Bunton. "Hurry up and let us in." Now there was a dangerous tension in his voice.

Lonesome took a key from his pocket and stooped to the padlock. They all heard a slight metallic grating, as he tried to insert the key. He muttered with annoyance and tried again. He kept shifting his feet about in the sand, as though to gain a better position.

"The darn thing's rusted," he said.

Magruger, behind Lonesome cursed viciously under his breath. "Better get it open," he muttered dangerously. He pressed up between Lonesome and Bunton and peered down at the padlock.

"Maybe I could if I had a hairpin or something to dig it out with," said Lonesome. "Maybe the girl's got a hairpin."

"Give him a hairpin," said Bunton. "And hurry up."

"Yes, do, Rosa," said Lonesome.

Rosa had hesitated, but something in Lonesome's voice drew her forward. She

came up on Lonesome's left and brushed lightly against his wounded shoulder, as she reached over to place the hairpin in his right hand. Her own hand received a slight pressure, as she did so. Their heads were close together, but Lonesome dared not whisper. He pushed her away, however—pushed her lightly and significantly to the left. Quickly she moved in that direction, as far as she dared. Perhaps three feet from the group. She stood there watching, knowing that something was to happen. Tensely she raised her right hand to the opening in the front of her dress.

Lonesome did not see this movement. Retaining the key somewhat awkwardly in the last two fingers of his right hand, he began picking at the lock with the hairpin, held with his thumb and first two fingers. Suddenly, to the accompaniment of an annoyed exclamation from him, the key fell, jingling upon a rock at his feet.

He stooped down slowly, careful of his wounded shoulder. But he came up as swiftly as a bent spring released. Magruger, next to Lonesome on the right, started a laugh, as he saw that blow coming. Lonesome hadn't room to strike effectively, and, anyway, Lonesome was half Magruger's strength and size. But the laugh was never finished, for Lonesome had come up with a rock in his hand.

Magruger went down as if struck by a hammer, and at the same instant Rosa darted around the corner of the cabin. As Lonesome struck, he had shouted to her to run; then pain, sudden, terrific, and well-nigh paralyzing, shot through him from his wounded muscles, torn open again by the exertion of the blow. Weak, confused, and almost unconscious, he sprawled heavily down across Magruger's thighs.

HE felt himself going into oblivion, and he almost wished that it was death. Fear of what Four-fingered Jack and Bunton would do to him was upon him. But at that moment he was shocked back to consciousness again by the force of a tremendous discovery. By accident, or by an instinctive, uncon-

scious effort, his right hand had found the revolver in Magruger's holster.

With the greatest effort of his life, Lonsome rallied his senses and dragged out the revolver. He knew his case was still hopeless, for Four-fingered Jack and Bunton must have their guns on him by now; but he might hold against the shock of their bullets a little while—he might keep them busy until—

Bunton and the Mexican had hesitated to shoot, because, in the darkness, they might easily have hit Magruger. And there was no great hurry; they had him, anyway, and a minute or so start would do Rosa no good. But now, as Lonesome twisted toward them, he found Four-fingered Jack right before him, with his gun swinging down to the aim.

"Don't kill him! Save him to play with!" Bunton was rasping malevolently.

Four-fingered Jack's gun, not five feet away, steadied upon Lonesome's right shoulder. Lonesome was trying to prop himself up with his disabled arm, so he could get his right arm up to fire. Then Magruger, struggling back to consciousness, heaved upward under Lonesome. Lonesome slid off him to the left, against the wall of the cabin, and the Mexican's bullet went wide.

Cursing, Four-fingered Jack followed up and raised his gun again. Lonesome, dazed by fresh pain from his crippled shoulder, could not get into action. And Bunton was coming closer, gun at the ready. Well, Rosa had a start, anyway. And—Four-fingered Jack fired.

Or was it he that fired? Lonesome heard the report, but felt no bullet's impact, nor saw the flash of the Mexican's gun. Instead, there seemed a flash at the corner of the cabin. For an instant Lonesome searched the darkness for the origin of it; then he turned his attention again to Four-fingered Jack. But Four-fingered Jack was sprawling on the ground.

Bunton, with an almost whimpering cry of rage, as of a devil baffled, had turned and was running in the direction from which had come that mysterious shot.

Mysterious? A flashing memory came to Lonesome of the sentence Rosa

had begun, then broken off, when she gave him her gun. She'd started to tell him that she had—what? The sound of the shot from the corner of the cabin was still ringing in Lonesome's ears; it was the unmistakable crack of a derringer, tiniest of guns and most easily concealed.

It was Rosa, then, who had saved him. Rosa had refused to take her chance and leave him there; her flight had only taken her around the cabin. But Rosa could no longer save herself, for a derringer carries only one bullet. And Bunton had turned the corner.

Lonesome was there in a moment. He saw Rosa fleeing down the opposite side of a sand dune, not fifty feet away. Bunton, driven by insensate anger or some mad design, was close behind her. A little farther, and they would both pass out of sight behind the dune.

Lonesome might stagger after them, but not fast enough, for he was weak from the renewed bleeding from his wound. He leaned against the wall of the cabin to steady himself, and, with a wordless prayer, he swung up Magruger's gun, with the accurate aim of a good shot. In an instant, and for a second, he was like a statue, the fingers with which he held the gun nerveless as ivory and as unshaking.

The gun flamed, cracked, recoiled. Had it been his own, Lonesome would not have waited to see the effect of the bullet. As it was, he stood for a moment, observant. Then he turned to Magruger, swaying uncertainly on his feet, and Four-fingered Jack, still on the ground.

"Your friend ain't dead, but he's ceased to trouble," he announced. "An' now I guess we'd better all take a sashay into San Francisco. Me to collect an apology an' thanks, an' you to collect—your dues."

ON a bright morning a little later, Rosa and Lonesome leaned on the rail of her father's ship and watched an approaching clipper slip past toward the line of wharves that edged the wood-and-canvas city. The clipper's upper deck was jammed with men of all sorts,

conditions, and nationalities, wild with their first glimpse of the land of promise—the land of gold. From well forward came a roaring song from a hundred throats, rolling over the water toward the smaller vessel like a mighty chorus:

"I'll soon be in San Francisco,
And then I'll look around;
And when I see the gold lumps there,
I'll pick them off the ground.
I'll scrape the mountains clean, girl,
I'll drain the rivers dry,
A pocketful of rocks bring home—
Suzanna, don't you cry!"

"And they will, too, Rosa," said Lonesome. "Gee, it's a great old country! Gold—gold in the river beds, gold on the hills, gold in the pockets——"

"But not in yours, Lonesome," interrupted Rosa, smiling mischievously yet tenderly, at the memory of his fable of a cache of gold.

Lonesome flushed. "Aw, well, I've just been driftin' around. Never even staked a claim. But it's there, all right. I've seen—— And there's other things to this country. Things *grow* out here. I've seen trees four hundred feet high—and a field of beets that weighed a hundred pounds each, the smallest of 'em. It's a grand country, Rosa."

"I don't see why, then," questioned Rosa, "you're coming back with us?"

"Well, you see, somebody's got to help your father work her back. And there's four friends of mine just come back from the mines that say they'll ship if I will. And, besides—well, Rosa, a fellow gets tired just driftin' around. A fellow kinda wants to stake a claim some time. And—well, that's it."

"So you're settling down by starting on a trip around the Horn. What a funny idea! And you're staking a claim on—— My, I'd just like to know what you're staking a claim on."

"Would you, Rosa?" Suddenly he turned and looked at her squarely, with eyes both timid and boldly questioning. And he might have pressed the question, had not her own clear eyes grown timid also, so that they were compelled to look away—look anywhere but at him. They

stood there joined in a mutual, increasing embarrassment, with Lonesome tongue-tied for once, but with the knowledge warming him through that words were not needed to tell her what he meant. And they might have stood there till sunset, had not the sound of Rosa's father—sobered again and for a lifetime

—coming up the ladder broken the spell and startled them to another quick exchange of glances.

"And it's my first claim," blurted Lonesome, as they turned away from the rail.

"Mine, too," said Rosa, but in so low a tone that he could not hear her.

MOTHER GOOSE HOLDS HER OWN

THIS is the age of the press agent and the providers of publicity. The art of advertising has passed into the category of one of the exact sciences. Everything, from philosophy to fiddles, is press-agented. Literature, it is insisted, is no exception to the rule. No writer can ever hope to get a big public unless he is properly advertised and sufficiently promoted by his publisher.

In the face of these now universally accepted methods for "putting" a book "over," we have the old-fashioned notion that nothing can put a book or a piece of writing over definitely, but the reading public. An instance in point is the book known as "Mother Goose Melodies." Here is a book that never had a press agent, and yet, in spite of the attacks of advanced child culturists, it is still one of the most widely read and most popular books in America. Mother Goose's jingles may not be included in any college course, but Mother Goose is the universal American poet. No boy who has ever read "The Man in the Moon," "Old Mother Hubbard," "Jack and Jill," "Little Bo Peep," and a dozen others, can ever forget the sheer magic of this happy union of sound, sense, and music. There is deep, profound wisdom back of most of these melodies, but taken even on the surface, they are full of sound observation and sound morals.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1927.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Charles A. McLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.;

George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of March, 1927. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public No. 197, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1929.)



OLD-TIMERS

By Berton Braley

THEY were Scotch and they were Irish, they were Yank and they were wop,
 They were Welsh and they were Finn and Cousin Jack;
 They were six feet two or longer from the bottom to the top,
 They were three feet wide, or more, across the back.
 That's the sort the mines were filled with in the days of auld lang syne.
 When the camp was rather rawer than to-day,
 When a miner was a miner in a mine that was a mine,
 And a man was free and reckless with his pay.

Now they herd a lot of hunkies into barracks and to work—
 Just a bunch of cattle driven to the job;
 And a name like Kelly, Morgan, Davis, MacIntyre or Burke
 Is a name you'll seldom find among the mob.
 All those arrogant old-timers with the bold and steady eyes
 Who would argue with the boss as man to man,
 All those free and independent, devil-take-you sort of guys—
 Try to find 'em in the workings if you can!

Things are better now, they tell me; life is safer underground,
 And the "labor's more dependable," I hear,
 But I loved the kind I worked with—they were great to have around.
 For they didn't even know the name of Fear.
 They would drink with you or fight you, they would risk their lives for yours,
 They were roisterers and ruffians now and then;
 But as friends and fellow workers still their memory endures,
 For they were not merely miners—they were *Men!*

A Chat With You

ANY one who likes good stories has a reserved-seat ticket for a place near our camp fire—that is, a ringside seat. It is possible that at this time of year, with the warmer weather coming on apace, you may not be overcharmed with the notion of a camp fire, or any other sort of a fire. Remember, however, that for one who lives outdoors, while the sun may be very warm in the afternoon, the earth becomes very cold at night. One may tuck in, husky and glowing, rolled in stout blankets, but when the gray dawn is breaking there is generally a chill in the bones, and it is pleasant to see a glowing ember among the ashes and to know that coffee is coming soon. The trouble with sleeping outdoors in any weather, as we figure it, is that the earth is much too large to be warmed up by any human body, and that the earth is never quite so warm and kind as she seems on golden springtime afternoons.

* * * *

SETTING aside the question of temperature, there is much to be said for the camp fire. There are such insects as punkies, midges and mosquitoes and they sting and tickle and annoy, as any one who has lived in the woods may testify. And while you may smear yourself with some patent grease, or lave your countenance and hands with citronella, there is no prophylactic so wholesome and natural as honest wood smoke. Somewhere, perhaps in the dim Miocene, the first man smelled it. Certainly, during those long centuries, when the slow glaciers advanced an inch or two a year, perhaps, but so steadily and resistlessly that it seemed as if they would freeze this whole round earth—during these long frozen times the most civilized of

men, the gifted ones, the leaders, were the fire bringers and the fire bearers. Who struck the first flint to steel, so that its spark might fall on kindling tinder? Who first spun an arrow against soft wood, so that by and by it smoked, then kindled and blossomed into a little yellow flower of flame? No one knows his name. The Greeks had a name for him, and it is quite likely that every primitive people who had left within them the memory of the tremendous change between a world without a kindling light and one with a hearth fire, preserve some tradition of the Fire Bringer.

* * * *

IT is true that there are gas stoves and electric stoves—as the saying is—to burn. They cook our food, when we need it, from day to day, in the regular houses, hotels and restaurants. That is the place for the city people. With them the easiest way is often the best way. What do they get out of it? Comfort? There are better things than comfort. There is the high upland trail. And on that trail each night there is the scent of a wood fire—small fire, perhaps, after the Indian fashion. And by that fire each night, sniffing the smoke and, perhaps, smoking a pipe, there sits a man. And so, sometimes, beside the fire there is a girl as well.

* * * *

WHAT is she like? How can we tell? She is everywhere the same and always different. Women will whisper to each other that all men are just alike. Men, when they care to be as honest with each other as women are, will say much the same about ladies. However, be that as it may, and setting past reflections all

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aside, the best place to get acquainted with a man is near a camp fire. As for girls—the best place to get acquainted with them is anywhere at all.

The tang and verve of the Western air, the musky scent of wood smoke, the

wholesomeness of natural, outdoor people are all ready for you in the stories you will read in the next POPULAR. Look down on the list below and let us hear from you whether you like them or don't like them. But you will like them.

The Popular Magazine

In the Next Number, June 7, 1927

The Hound of the Barrys

N. MEADE and CAPTAIN A. P. CORCORAN

Marching Men

FRED MacISAAC

A Four-part Serial—Part I.

The Savage Core

CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE

The Parson's Spine

KARL W. DETZER

A Lad Who Was Afraid

FREDERICK NIVEN

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